

Bravo and *Mazel Tov*

Judith Brin Ingber

Israel has been the fount of many things over the centuries, and dance-wise it is also a burbling spring. In the 1960s its modern dance took on an American slant when Martha Graham agreed to lend many of her works to train the new company founded by the Baroness Bethsabée de Rothschild. (Bethsabée in Hebrew is Batsheva, so the company was named after its benefactor.)

Known from its beginning in 1964 as the Batsheva Dance Company, this troupe has produced many generations of dancers and choreographers. Ohad Naharin, first a dancer and now the company's core choreographer, has directed the company for the last 24 years. His works are appreciated the world over, as is his Gaga Technique. In addition to Batsheva, his works can be seen in companies including the Alvin Ailey Dance Theater; the Cullberg Ballet; Paris Opera Ballet; Lyon Opera Ballet; Hubbard Street Dance Chicago; Rambert Dance Company and others.

One way Israeli dance has become well known internationally is through the remarkable yearly dance festivals in Israel. The International Exposure festival has brought international presenters and curators to see dance companies and independent dance artists over the last 19 winters.

The Karmiel Festival began as an Israeli folk-dance festival in 1988. Now this summer festival presents Israeli dance of all styles; and several hundred thousand visitors can also view international companies during this week-long event. Other festivals include the Curtain Up festival (*Arimat Masakh*). The newest is the Diver Festival featuring non-mainstream subject matter.

Batsheva Dance Company is still the top attraction in Israel, though. You might want to re-read Brian Schaefer's article in the DCA's spring newsletter called "Tel Aviv Diary, Following Dance to Unexpected Places" to get a sense of the excitement and commitment the company engenders. Several extraordinary events marked Batsheva's 50th anniversary. Celebrations in Tel Aviv offered audiences, academics and dance professionals a wide range of experiences to appreciate the accomplishments of this unique dance company. First there was a two-day academic conference presenting scholars from diverse disciplines at Tel Aviv University, on Wednesday and Thursday, June 18-19, 2014. Those who attended the conference were also invited to an open company rehearsal, on Wednesday evening at Suzanne Dellal Dance Centre. A special exhibition introduced the Batsheva Dance Company Archives, opening on Thursday evening at the Tel Aviv Municipal Library. The rousing finish was Batsheva's gala performance at the Tel Aviv Opera House on Saturday, June 21, 2014.

The conference was well organized by dance scholar Dr. Liora Malka Yellin, a professor in the Department of Theatre Arts, with the aid of an academic committee; the Dance Library of Israel directed by Victoria Khodorkovsky; and the Batsheva Archives directed by Iris Lana with assistance from Hagar Cygler. The conference entitled "The Batsheva Dance Company: Body, Dance, Culture," included presentations by dancers, scholars and artists. Guest speaker Marc Franko, from Temple University in Philadelphia, delivered the keynote address. Dr. Yellin's enthusiasm was palpable as she opened the conference with her thoughts on a possible historiography of the Batsheva repertory,



Ohad Naharin speaking at Batsheva Dance Company's 50th-anniversary gala
Photo: Gadi Dagon

enhanced by a screening of the film "Fifty Years of Creation, a Short Collage of Works." Considering all the papers and panels, videos and dance demonstrations, one can only say that diverse opinions ruled the day. Attempts to define Batsheva as "modern," "contemporary" or "post-modern" broke down, as did endeavors to interpret its repertoire through gender studies and feminist theory. Even a neat, 50-year timeline for the company proved elusive.

An unintended summary of the conference could be seen in the subtitle that the Batsheva Archives used for its exhibit: "More than One History." There were so many histories and views presented during the two days that one could see the richness and provocative nature of Batsheva. These varied opinions were exciting to hear, because they showed how many valid and diverse views can come together when discussing the company. The attendees went beyond the usual scholars at an academic conference, and they had many different reasons for coming. During the "Interdisciplinary Panel"

with scholars from the fields of sociology, anthropology and cultural studies, theater professor Freddie Rokem said, “The whole world looks at our dance and the outside says that there’s something Israeli, something authentic,” which seemed to be what many were seeking. Batsheva has represented and embodied its Israeli identity in all its different eras and guises. The body was considered strong and positive in 19th-century Zionism. When Batsheva was created in the 1960s, it was as if Max Nordau, the early Zionist philosopher, was saying, “Here I see my slogan: healthy souls in healthy bodies.”

Conferences in the USA allow time for panelists to make rebuttals and for audience members to ask questions, so it was hard to get used to the Israeli system of listening to papers without planned response time. Nonetheless, Liora Bing-Heidecker’s paper on John Cranko’s 1971 choreography *Song of My People-Forest People-Sea (Ami-Yam Ami-Ya’ar)*—the first dance work about the Holocaust shown in Israel—caused debate. She said Cranko asked the dancers to do only the simplest movements without expression, while the audience heard Uri Zvi Greenberg’s powerful poem about his father disrobing in the forest in front of his murderers. Some conference attendees who had performed in the work stood up to argue with the presenter.

The second day offered an interview with Rena Gluck, one of the founding Batsheva dancers. Gluck talked about learning Graham technique, and what it was like for the Israeli dancers who went to the Graham studio in New York. She also spoke of how she learned Graham’s role in *Herodiade*, and demonstrated different sections of the work displaying her still powerful charisma. Gluck also described the tedious, incessant way the dancers had to rehearse, never knowing who would perform a Graham



Rena Gluck and Galia Gat in *Herodiade* 1965, Photo: Jacob Agor

role until just before going on stage. That caused terrible tension among the dancers.

Scholars searched for a vocabulary to describe the Israeli body, as Yael Nativ proposed in her paper, “An Israeli Body: Images of Masculinity, Sexuality and Nationality at Batsheva, Past and Present.” Looking at Graham’s *Embattled Garden*, Nativ said the choreographer still showed women whose bodies were part of a symbolic, kinetic and social construct belonging to the West, whereas a transformation of the Jewish body in Israel liberated the Jewish male from Diasporic femininity. As in the Soviet Union, Israeli men appeared as noble workers. A former Batsheva dancer in the audience, Pam Sharni, argued that Nativ was stereotyping images of femininity and masculinity in the repertory prior to Naharin, however. “Maybe men were men, and women were women, but it was all part of what was happening. I think through the technique lessons with Graham the men could feel something feminine through the contraction, which was very feminine, and the women could feel what was masculine

through the strong jumps in the air. All dancers wanted to feel what is feminine and what is masculine, and Graham allowed us this in her works,” Sharni said. The audience broke into applause.

As an Israeli man, Batsheva dancer Moshe Efrati looked different than the typical American male. A film clip of him speaking about his love of rhythm and jumping indicated some differences. Rahamim Ron talked about auditioning for Graham and his innocence coming from folk dancing on the kibbutz—he said he just followed the audition class, and didn’t know what he was supposed to do. When he received a letter of acceptance, he was baffled; though Ron became one of the leading male dancers of the company. According to Nativ, the West had expectations of men on stage that were completely foreign to the masculine image in Israeli Zionism. She also said that in Naharin’s choreography today masculinity has a new look. Movement can be non-sexual and pure, rather than either feminine or masculine. She asked if we could see masculine alternatives, with options such as queer and hybrid. Speaking from the audience, Rena Gluck

objected to this neat delineation. She also stood her ground to describe the difficulty of working with foreign directors who didn't understand Hebrew or the culture, and how that distanced them from the dancers and the public.

In her paper, Ruth Eshel, critic for the daily *Haaretz* and editor of the quarterly magazine *Dance Today* (*Mahkol Ahkshav*), spoke about changes in the company during the 1980s, a transition time between its early repertory and Naharin's. She said that was when there was international excitement and acceptance, but again the audience objected. This time it was the director of the Batsheva Archives, Iris Lana, who said Batsheva had been acclaimed on its international tours long before Naharin became its choreographer.

We also heard a personal memoir from stage designer Dani Karavan, who collaborated with Graham. First he had designed for Inbal Dance Theatre, and Graham came backstage to meet him telling him how much she wanted to dance within one of his sets. Karavan worked with her in New York, and collaborated with her several times.

When it came to analyzing specific works, different scholars focused on Naharin's *Kyr*, *Mamootot*, *Anaphase* and *Naharin's Virus*. Also Dr. Einav Katan, from Humboldt University in Berlin, spoke about Gaga Technique and its sensuality. While she spoke, two dancers from the company, Nitzan Ressler and Adi Zlatin, demonstrated their daily investigations and Gaga movements. "Just before the class began," Katan said, "they might have been lying on the floor tired, their muscles surrendering to gravity. During practice, however, their beings change modes. They stand up and are ready to move. Ohad Naharin, the teacher of the class, instructs them to float, and immediately the vertebrae of their spines move away from one another. The arms are lifted

slightly, and their entire skeleton seems to hold itself and to elevate the flesh gently because of a delicate change in physical attitude. Thus, instead of dropping down and following the laws of gravity, the body itself creates a new source of energy. In consequence, float exists. Float is one instruction in Gaga classes."

Mark Franko's keynote, "Historicizing the 'Re' in Danced Reenactment," diverged from the analysis of Batsheva's history and repertory to delve into "danced reenactment." Franko's ideas were challenging, when he said that it is daring to perform a work without the original interpreter, and when he disagreed with seeking authenticity instead of discussing concepts of reinventing and reenacting a dance. Because of his interest in archives, and the fact that as consultant to the Batsheva Archives he helped them attain their state-of-the-art presence on-line, no one expected his approach. In speaking about dancer Martin Nachbar's reenactment of dances by the German Expressionist Dore Hoyer, Franko wasn't interested in a representation

of the past. Instead, he said that "the past exists as it is included and symbolized in historical memory, and this is why we are rewriting history in new textures."

Those attending the conference were given the added treat of attending an open company rehearsal, held in the Suzanne Dellal Centre for Dance and Theatre. Located in the old, picturesque Neve Tzedek neighborhood of Tel Aviv, the Suzanne Dellal Centre has been Batsheva's home since 1989. There are several theatres and studios; and we found Naharin and his dancers in the biggest studio with bleacher seating at one end. He conducted the rehearsal in his unruffled, quiet mode, but first he addressed the audience: "We just met upstairs to decide what to do, but in the meantime I've changed my mind." The audience laughed, because he said it in a lighthearted way. "My first audience is 'me.' I ask myself to think, to feel, to imagine and to be sensitive, which is a kind of paradox because we live in a rude society. Though we're not really like that... Maybe I come up with virtuoso movement, flight, and perhaps



Batsheva Dance Company in *The Green Table*, Photo: Jacob Agor

I find a way in movement to sublimate pain... Sometimes things look out of focus, or the dancers break stereotypes in movement. I do like to look at a beautiful body, its hue and texture, but I get bored if it's only beautiful... It all gives me many options. I try not to hide things from myself. ... and technically, well, one needs tools."

His tools have multiplied over the years; and his Gaga Technique has taken the world by storm. When asked about it, he said, "We all started today with Gaga. It's not choreography, but discovery. Dancers need a safety net when they're taught 'a technique' that takes away from their authenticity. Gaga helps a lot." At the rehearsal, he simply asked for different sections to be danced. A dancer came out and crossed his arm over his collar bone. Then four others posed around him. A duet proceeded, and a girl kissed an odd girl out. A man brutally dragged another man. Then the dancer identified as Billy sat in an exaggerated split and lifted his hips, and a woman came up behind him and kicked his ass. Incongruously she moved into a fabulously high arabesque, but what we noticed were the pockets of

her shorts, which were longer than the shorts themselves. Dancers in a group were on their knees punching the earth in slow motion. Then they twitched on the ground. One group counted in Arabic, and then in other languages. Naharin said, "OK, thank you. Can we do sections 1-9 with the women?" We saw a slow hip swivel in a deep pli e, while another dancer came in with an odd limp. Later we would recognize these sections, when they were danced at the Gala.

Naharin offered no explanation or context at the rehearsal. The movements were repeated and then repeated again, apparently to test juxtapositions of sections from different dances and also simply to rehearse. But he did say, "One of the important aspects of being a dancer is how we work on interpretation. It's not about my choreography. It has to do with what turns me on, why we want to be together and how can we go beyond what we know from yesterday. The dancers don't know what song I'll pick. Alright? Do you want to start, and then I'll bring the music in?" The dancers gave him an answer, and some sashayed onto the floor and fell

with tremendous force as the singer sang, "I'm falling, falling, falling," one of the few times the sound coordinated with the movement.

Naharin said, "A lot of what we want is for you to understand what we do. It has a lot to do with the space, and I want you to see the content and the form as one thing. Put the form and the content into a blender. Some say, 'Oh, this is Israeli,' or 'This is the story behind it.' Others say, 'This is the army experience.' But it's like gossiping. That's not really what it's about. Speed, volume, texture—what tells of efficiency—that's more important than what the story is, or what comes from or to the country."

There was a contradiction in Naharin's sensitivity to his dancers, their fatigue and the reason for their dancing. He said, "Firstly we dance for each other. We don't need an audience. We do this for and with each other." But on the other hand, he was demanding until through repetition the dancers arrived at his desired outcome. Obsessive and risky were some of the words that came to mind as we watched, with dancers in high relev e suddenly dropping to the floor, creating surprising exchanges in odd holds that could be pleasurable or dramatic because of changes of weight or high extensions, then low traveling squats and random moments of unison without obvious logic or organic flow. Certainly at the rehearsal we became more attuned to Naharin's brand of movement and its unique organization, preparation for the sections chosen at the Gala.

Many conference attendees, plus former Batsheva dancers, enthusiastic supporters and the general public went to the Municipal Library called Beit Ariella the following night. It was the opening of the Archives' exhibition, which ran until September 11. The Municipal Library is also the location for the impressive Dance Library of Israel. For those who love rubbing elbows with stars, this was the first



Echad Mi Yodea at the Batsheva Gala, Photo: Gadi Dagon

chance to talk with or simply watch dancers who had returned for the occasion from across the country and from abroad. Iris Lana, archivist and director, opened the evening in the well-appointed library theatre by speaking of the challenge of finding records, photographs and information about the dances in the repertory over the last 50 years. Nonetheless, the material is now available on-line and is an impressive new tool for researchers, critics and dance historians. [See <http://www.batsheva.co.il/en/?iid=3183>]

At the exhibit one could view posters, stage designs and enlarged photographs attesting to the remarkable breadth and sweep of the choreographers. For example, we saw the young Israelis in Martha Graham's *Acrobats of God* in 1964; and Rina Schenfeld and Moshe Efrati in *Errand into the Maze*; John Cranko's *Ebony Concerto* with Yael Lavy, Yacov Sharir and Yair Vardi (now the director of Suzanne Dellal Centre) from 1971; Kurt Jooss re-staging his *Green Table* in 1975; and the young Naharin on his first tour with the company. Above the handsome displays of photos most of the headlines and descriptions were in Hebrew, except for Franko's favorite word, "reenactment," in English. Touring pictures, studio shots, informal and professional photos well illustrated the youthful winning character of the company through the years.

Performance programs were spread on a center table that became the focal point of the evening. Dancers, some completely white-haired, excitedly paged through the programs giggling over photos showing their youthful selves, and the dances still part of their muscle memory.

The culmination of the Batsheva celebrations was the gala performance at the elegant Opera House situated in a plaza akin to New York's Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts. In addition to the Opera House, one

can find the Municipal Library there and the well-known Cameri Theatre; the Tel Aviv Art Museum; also the municipal court house and restaurants. The area is always filled with people day or night.

After a lavish, outdoor reception, this remarkable evening began with a new documentary, *The First Night*, about Batsheva's premiere performance in 1964 held at the National Habimah Theatre. The film, by Gilad Tokatly, was a surprise because Tomer Hyman's forthcoming biopic about director Ohad Naharin had been the expected opener. However, since the first 24 years of the Batsheva Company were entwined with Martha Graham and



Ohad Naharin and the author at The International Dance Exposure Festival (Winter 2013)

her works, Tokatly's documentary with Graham ever-present turned out to be a fitting opener. Interviews and clips with stars and choreographers of the Batsheva Dance Company cemented the wonder at what a truly unusual company the baroness had founded. Some featured dancers included Robert Cohan, Moshe Efrati, Rina Shefeld and Rena Gluck. The film also showed the company's extraordinary successes on its world-wide tours through the 1970s.

Following the film, Naharin came on stage attired in his usual jeans and dark shirt. He spoke in English

because, he said, there were so many foreigners present. He was charming and eloquent—not traits this reticent and perhaps shy artist is known for. After emphasizing his thanks to the 411 dancers who performed with Batsheva over the years, his talk morphed amusingly into a show-stopping rap listing “the many thousands who worked with the company—and you can find out who by going to the Archives.” Then he listed all kinds of jobs: from the 136 choreographers to the lighting designers, technicians, electricians, costumers and wardrobe assistants, down to the very last skilled artisan needed to produce a dance evening. The names of all the dancers were projected on the back scrim and balloons floated in.

In the second half of the program, the audience greeted excerpts from Naharin's works with utter enthusiasm. We saw the pulsing, driving, vastly different *Zachacha* (1998), *Z/na* (1995), *Anaphase* (1993), *Naharin's Virus* (2001), *George* (2006), *Zalman* (2006), *Seder* (from the original *Kyr*, 1990), and *Sadeh 21* (2010). Some are now classics. The best known section was “Who Knows One” (*Echad Mi Yodea*) opening with male and female dancers clad alike in black business suits with white shirts. The usual version shows the company members seated on folding chairs arranged in a semi-circle. During the gala, however, the whole stage was filled with rows and rows of dancers on chairs totaling perhaps 70 performers. The Batsheva Dance Company was augmented by the Batsheva Ensemble and students from the Masloul Professional Dance Program and Bikurey Hatim Arts Center. The effect of them all moving together and singing the Passover song *Echad Mi Yodea* “Who Knows One”, backed by the rock band Tractor, was grand indeed. Many in the audience treated it like a rock song, joining in on the chorus. (The song engages the whole family at the conclusion of the yearly Passover meal. It asks, “Who

knows one? One? I know one. One is the God of the world, above in the sky.” The questions and answers continue faster and faster, the answers shouted out by all those assembled at the table. For example, “Who knows two? I know two. Two are the tablets of the covenant. Who knows three? I know three. Three are the patriarchs.” The song continues through the number 13 triumphantly finishing with “I know one. One is the one God of the world.”)



Pam Sharni and Laurie Freedman, Batsheva dancers in the 60s and 70s. Judith Brin Ingber on right at the Tel Aviv University Batsheva Dance Conference

The cumulative effect of the song, the unison movement and the musical volume penetrated to the bones of the audience. A kind of fugue was created as the dancers, moving in waves, tipped backward in their chairs, jumped to their feet or threw their clothes in the air, while others collapsed onto the ground.

Despite Naharin’s admonition in his rehearsal not to look for meaning, it was hard to ignore the piles of clothes and shoes without thinking of World War-II concentration camps. Did others think instead of civilians morphing into soldiers, or of the religious in their black suits disrobing, or of the waste of youth and the loss of

individuality? Does one dare to think there might be hope with the chance to start again? The magnitude of it all was astounding.

The cascade of Naharin dances established the choreographer’s originality and their variety provoked wonder. At one time, as the dancers moved, a disembodied voice intoned the words “Forget the time of Bialik (the national Israeli poet), of your home with your parents. Watch and listen.” But we notice it is the dancers who are watching us. We hear a strange sound track, and wonder if the dancers are laughing or crying. Neon colors swathe the stage, making it magical and dangerous by turns.

At the end of the gala, the dancers’ names disappeared from the wall and dancers clambered onto it from behind. In the most dramatic moment from Naharin’s *Sadeh 21*, they teetered atop the wall and then fell into the black abyss behind. They were jumping, diving, struggling and soaring. Incongruously we heard “Somewhere Over the Rainbow” on the sound track, and were left with glorious images of dancers flying, ignoring boundaries and propelling us forward, too. We were all free—dancers and audience members—to imagine the future and fly into it. What will Batsheva conjure for us next?

After the concert, the audience walked out onto the plaza and was treated to desserts and more wine. Now we had time to look through the jubilee program booklet. Its modest cover with a touch of gold print said simply in small letters “50, From 1964 to 2014, The Jubilee Year of the Batsheva Dance Company.” But its over-sized thickness and weight proved something big had occurred. The essay by Israeli dance writer Gaby Aldor stood out. She has given her permission to quote from it. We await her forthcoming book on Ohad Naharin to be published by Israeli dance publisher Asia Press. Part of what she wrote in the Program booklet says:

The Miracle:

In the 1920s, the first cultural clash occurred when the pioneers came from Germany, a global center of culture, and created modern dance in Israel for the first time. They connected the revolutionary spirit they brought with the local spirit, dancing barefoot on the planks of public buildings in Tel Aviv, or on the sand dunes or on the tables of the kibbutz. They built studios and opened the eyes of the audience. The pioneers danced until they grew old, and until their free dance, also called the Expressionist dance, was exhausted and slowly faded.

This introduction enhances the feeling of wonder regarding a different encounter of cultures, once again a clash. This time, the story concerns a baroness from the Rothschild dynasty, Batsheva, who fulfilled her Zionist dream and immigrated to Israel, where nobility was not a function of wealth, and where the only palaces remaining are those from the days of the Greeks and the Romans and Herod. She brought Martha Graham with her—Graham, the dancer, the revolutionary, the artist. Graham came to a city with only one studio that had a wooden floor.

Batsheva had inexperienced but enthusiastic dancers who were fearless and beautiful. They had already danced on the kibbutz, and had served in the army. They had courage and in a giant leap over voids of knowledge they stood on the theater stage and called themselves the ‘Batsheva Dance Company,’ and the world applauded them.

Batsheva’s dancers now danced the Greek dramas. The Graham style became the spoken language of Israeli dance. Rena Gluck, Galia Gat, Rahamim Ron and Ehud Ben David were dancers from the troupe who also experimented and created. There was a feeling of success and blossoming. For the second time in the history of

Israeli culture there was funding for a dance company—the first was for the Inbal Dance Theatre—and now we joined the great big world. In spite of what was called ‘the energy of Israeli dancers,’ they still danced a dance whose body was Israeli but whose language, in all its beauty, was foreign.

The Graham body was strong, upright and flexible, but also angular and took space in leaps that were not upwards but sideways and down, with a bold look. The Graham legs were taut, but the foot was not sharp as in classical ballet. Batsheva danced Graham’s *Errand into the Maze* and *Herodiade*, *Embattled Garden* and *Acrobats of God*. The finest artists were called upon to create sets. The domestic and the international mixed once again; and it seemed there had never been a finer or a richer style than Graham’s. The critics lauded the audacious young company. Rina Shenfeld was considered one of the world’s finest dancers. Artistic directors came and went, and bold souls left the company to found their own ensembles. But like any living organism, this system too became tired. The Graham body could no longer respond to the needs of its young members, and after the post-modern revolution in New York rejected glamour in favor of the simple and the mundane, a bit like the rejection of the pathetic in post-war Germany, a space was created.

Moshe Efrati worked with deaf and hearing dancers to create powerful works. His company was called *Kol Ve Demama* (The Voice and Silence). Oshra Elkayam creates a first dance theater and the Kibbutz Dance Company embarks on international stages. Artistic directors of Batsheva came in—David Dvir and Moshe Romano and Shelly Shir—and too many dancers to mention. Now with the Suzanne Dellal Centre built, there is an expectation of something new.



Echad Mi Yodea at the Batsheva Gala , Photo: Gadi Dagon

The Gift:

We have received a gift wrapped in darkness. Flickering it appears and disappears, leaving traces of light and color, touching us and striking our hearts, leaving enigmas. The world in which we live is different, after the years in which Naharin created his works. For the first time, a native Israeli leads the company, one who is a gifted dancer, a kibbutz boy who studied with Graham as well as Béjart and who became one of the world’s most important dance artists.

Imagine our memory without the parade of water pitchers in *Anaphase*. Try and erase *Mabul* from your mind. Take the wild chaos of organs in the solo of that work and fold them back into each other. Silence the unreciprocated cry in *Moshe*. Remove the judges’ robes in *Z/na* and the yell “Objection!”

Erase the arc of the foot in Rachael Osborne’s attitude, and the comic-serious plea by Orian, the first to dance with Mari Kajiwarra in *Pas-somezzo* as he shuffles forward, his two hands locked together in

prayer toward his teasing partner. Stop Peter Rombouts from singing the Baroque song in *Mabul*. Shut the billowing coats in *Arbos*. Cover Stephan’s nudity in *Mamootot*, in the role of death who mocks his own role, kisses and spits on his body, and carries with him she who has no life.

Now bring back the audience members who were invited on stage in *Anaphase* and take away their moment of glory, their courage to dance in front of everyone. Remove the birthday party that will never be forgotten by those who remained seated, embarrassed, until the entire company gathered around with celebratory balloons. Take back the names: *Black Milk*, *Mamootot*, *Z/na*, *Kaamos*, *Hora*, and *Sadeh 21*, *Perpetuum*, *Sabotage Baby*. Imagine the cliffs of Timna Park without *Telophaza*, and the Israeli dance scene without Rakefet Levy and Bambi and Ohad Naharin.

Here there is no collision of worlds and cultures. This is not the culture that created the turn-of-the-century revolution in Germany, and not the immense talent of the American Graham. Nor is it Inbal Dance Theatre,

beautiful with a tribal magic. This is something that has grown and blossomed here, and has taken off and broken all barriers.

The original Batsheva Company illuminates the current company with the historic light of the founders, its international context, and the dancers and artists who decorated its ranks. The current ensemble does not shame the legacy of the veteran company, but rather continues with a boldness and originality that are again applauded all over the world.

Like two sisters, the elder looks upon the younger with a tender gaze, concerned, surprised and approving. Naharin himself was there; he danced with Graham. Like two sisters, the younger looks ahead, and in spite of innovation, as in any good family, she knows she will have support.

But today, it's a family celebration. Please gather to take a group photo. No, the elders of the tribe do not need chairs. They can still demonstrate pieces from Glen Tetley's *The Mythical Hunters*, or John Cranko's *Song of My People-Forest People-Sea (Ami-Yam Ami-Ya'ar)*. They stand upright, because they cannot stand otherwise. And you, young ones, stand silently and think of the flesh separating from the bone in the language of Gaga. Breathe into the universe. Embrace the moment. With an almost imperceptible movement, nod your head and see the twinkle in the eyes of those who preceded you; and the most beautiful dance, that of memory, shall now begin following its path to the next celebration..."

Epilogue:

The weeks after my return home to Minneapolis, MN saw rocket incursions from Gaza into Israel increasing so substantially that war broke out. I was in touch by phone and email with colleagues in the dance world as well as family and friends.

At the end of August I received an email from Deborah Friedes Galili,

in charge of the Gaga teaching sessions and author of the blog www.DanceInIsrael.com.

She wrote to me that "We didn't postpone the Gaga Intensive, but about half the dancers had to cancel. The fact that the FAA stopped flights into Israel just about five days before the course made it a logistical nightmare for the dancers who still wanted to come from abroad, and for me on the administrative end. I've definitely gotten good at running for cover, though we're lucky enough to have a "safe room" in our apartment so I don't need to run far to a bomb shelter if I'm at home. I also know every safe space at Suzanne Dellal. I never thought I'd have to kick off a Gaga workshop with a tour of the shelters and reinforced areas, just in case."

There is a special duo of Israeli dancers, Niv Sheinfeld and Oren Laor, who work abroad extensively. In the USA, they have worked at Rutgers University. Sheinfeld and Laor sent me an email on August 21, during the war, which spoke for many: "This past month we've witnessed once again the rise of violence and human suffering in our region. At times it seems almost hopeless that sanity will ever conquer hostility and aggression, which have become too common in the Middle East. The question regarding the position of Art, and its necessity in this surreal atmosphere, is always with us in the studio and on stage when we perform. We still believe that Art builds a bridge between people, and that it encourages humanism and compassion in response to hatred, racism and apathy. In these difficult times we premiered our new work with 13 young dancers at the very beginning of their professional careers, and the work with them was our small ray of light."

In its 50th anniversary season, the Batsheva Dance Company toured the USA, visiting Miami; Los Angeles; Santa Barbara; San

Francisco; Brooklyn; Washington D.C.; and Chapel Hill. At the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center, through January 5, 2015 there was an exhibition documenting the work of American choreographers who have restaged their pieces on Batsheva, including Martha Graham, Jerome Robbins, Anna Sokolow, Donald McKayle, José Limón, Robert Cohan and more recently Elizabeth Streb, Doug Varone and Danny Ezralow. After the tour, the company returned to Tel Aviv to ready itself for the annual International Exposure Festival at the Suzanne Dellal Centre for Dance and Theatre, December 3-7, 2014. At the International Exposure Festival, Israel's leading companies were scheduled to perform including Batsheva; the Kibbutz Contemporary Dance Company; Inbal Pinto and Avshalom Pollack Company; Yasmeen Godder; the Vertigo Company; along with accomplished independents including dancers who got their start in Batsheva such as Yossi Berg and Oded Graf, and Arkadi Zaides. (For more information, contact Rachel Grodjinovski, the Foreign Relations director for Suzanne Dellal Centre for Dance and Theatre, rachel@suzannedellal.org.il).

Personally I am looking forward to new works by Barak Marshall, who recently was appointed director of Inbal Dance Theatre. I also want to see Idan Cohen's new work, Yossi Berg and also Niv Sheinfeld and Oren Laor. The latter duo won a special commendation at the International Exposure Festival for the best work of 2013 from the new Critics Circle. Their duet *Two Room Apartment* re-imagined a work of the same name by Liat Dror and Nir Ben-Gal from 1987.

No doubt the company of companies, Batsheva, will continue to inspire and innovate keeping up its remarkable position in Israel and abroad. Bravo and *mazel tov* to Batsheva for its jubilee year. 🌸



Batsheva Gala, finale, Photo: Gadi Dagon