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

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## Judith Brin Ingber

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

and perseverance despite the *Shoah*, bringing history to life and meaning in today's world, doubling the enchanting Hebrew number of 18 for an even stronger, vital 36. Enjoy this dynamic issue of *Mahol Akhshav* or *Dance Today* Number 36.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Co-creators of the Arizona State University (ASU) conference were **Naomi Jackson** and **Liz Lerman**. Naomi Jackson was its lead organizer; she is Associate Professor in ASU's School of Film, Dance and Theatre and has written several books including: *Dance, Human Rights, and Social Justice: Dignity in Motion* (co-edited with Toni Shapiro-Phim, Scarecrow Press) and *Converging Movements: Modern Dance and Jewish Culture at the 92nd Street Y* (Wesleyan University Press) as well as articles in such publications as *Dance Research Journal* and *Dance Chronicle*. In the spring, she presented the keynote address at the Conney Conference on Jewish Arts at the 92Y, New York City. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Od-hTMmeWI> (accessed June 30, 2019). [Naomi.Jackson@asu.edu](mailto:Naomi.Jackson@asu.edu).

Liz Lerman, choreographer, performer, writer of three published books, and the recipient of numerous honors, including a 2002 MacArthur Genius Grant is ASU's first Institute Professor at the Herberger Institute for Design and the Arts, making an on-line resource, the Atlas of Creative Tools, for people in all fields seeking creative solutions in their work. She is also a member of Temple Micah in Washington, DC where she has collaborated with the congregation and its rabbis over the past several decades. As part of Synagogue 2000 she introduced dance for congregational life throughout the United States and also ran a program called Moving Jewish Communities that brought Jewish dance artists together for shared learning.

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