



an interview with

Shlomo Bachar

by Jovana

NOTE: SHLOMO BACHAR was born in Israel and came to the United States in the late 1950's, working primarily in the theatre and in television. His wife, Dina, is at left in the picture on Page 4. The interview was given January 6, 1973, at the Federation Institute in San Jose. Questions are in capital letters.



WHERE COULD ONE GO IN ISRAEL TO FIND FOLK DANCING?

It is extremely difficult to find, because the towns are changing so fast in the last five years, that you have to know where the teachers are. You'll find that sessions will be three-quarters Israeli and one quarter International. They realize that if we want the Israeli dance to be accepted in other countries, we have to accept their dances too. We are a metropolitan country now, like any other country, young, but we do have to accept other nationalities. They do practice other dances, horribly wrong, but they do it. I saw them doing Greek dance just like doing Mayim. The Israeli style is so distinctive.

WHICH ISRAELI DANCES POPULAR IN AMERICA ARE ALSO DONE IN ISRAEL?

Only very few. However, if you ask for some of the older dances (like *Mayim*, *Lech Lamidbar*, *Dodi Li*, *Iti Milvanon*, *Ken Yovdu*, *Kol Dodi*, *Harmonica*), they would have the music and know the dance. But there are so many new dances in Israel which they prefer, that they do NOT do dances that we do here.

FROM WHICH COUNTRIES DID THE STEPS WHICH WERE INCORPORATED INTO ISRAELI DANCING COME?

Now, this is a very good question. Up to 1948, most of our dances were influenced by people from Eastern Europe, from Russia, Poland, Rumania. They came to Israel starting in 1922 to build the *kibbutzim*, the settlements. They had so much spirit. They would work 16, maybe 20 hours a day, And the rest of the 24 hours, they danced the Hora! I've been interviewed by radio and TV in Los Angeles, and they say, "Do the Israeli Hora!" Nobody realized that the Hora is Rumanian! It's not Israeli whatsoever! It's just that that's what the pioneers knew how to do. After that, they adapted their Eastern European steps to the new Israel (it still wasn't Israel, it was Palestine). They got the feeling of the land, the fields; they had a little more space to move. The jumps became a little bigger.

Then in 1948 there was a drastic change. The Yemenite people came from Saudi Arabia and brought many Yemenite steps, such as the one we did today, very soft. This step was done very narrow, because they had lived in such close quarters. If you go to Israel, you will notice the Yemenites can squat for hours and not get tired. They used to squat like this, then slowly get up, hold hands, and dance, very tightly, for recreation. They didn't have TV.

When they came to Israel, they brought a beautiful culture. We adopted just a FEW, because the rest are so authentic, ethnic and (subtle), that you can't teach it. You have to BE Yemenite. But we adopted two of them; one is the "Yemenite Step", which comes in many forms. You have the turns, and so forth. We adopted that into the Eastern European steps, along with the "Camel Step", which we also did today.

DO IMMIGRANTS BRING AND CONTINUE TO DANCE THEIR NATIVE DANCES?

Constantly. They don't contribute (style) too much now, but they practice their dances. When we have a festival, they come.

IN THEIR DESIRE TO INCORPORATE INTO ISRAEL, DO THEY DROP THEIR NATIVE DANCES?

Well, they do through the years. But whenever we have a festival, they come and do some of the dances that they were brought up with. Like, I was born in Israel. I was living with Arabs; that's all I know. I know the vigorous way that a Bedouin can dance, and I won't let go. I grew up with it.

(Immigrants) let go slowly, but not completely. And we don't want them to forget that Israel is composed of many cultures. We like to maintain their native traditions.

HOW CAN DANCES WHICH ARE COMPOSED IN THE UNITED STATES BE CONSIDERED "ISRAELI FOLK DANCING"?

They can't. I have one dance, *Hashaschar*, which was enthusiastically received in Israel, and as far as I know, it is being done there now. It's very pretty, has some folk in it, but it wasn't created in Israel. I was away for seven years. I didn't have the latest feeling about Israel. It's like here, Rock is constantly changing. The beat is a little different, the movements a little different. Everything changes every day. Now, I can't pretend that I wanted to be accepted in Israel as a folkdancer, as done in Israel. I can't.

In Israel there are about thirty choreographers. Every three months they bring their dances to the Dance Department and present maybe 80 dances. From these they accept maybe ten, which have good line, with the spirit of Israel, catchy, meaningful, everything. I can't pretend that mine is meaningful---I wasn't there! I did teach *Hashaschar*; they like it here; I happen to be lucky they are doing it in Israel, certain places. That's all I can tell you. But I don't believe that the dance that is created here will go to Israel. They just don't think much of them, and I don't blame them. It's like me trying to teach the Macedonian dance in one of the villages in Macedonia. They say, "What, are you crazy?" You know? It just doesn't click.

HAS THE WAR IN THE MIDDLE-EAST AFFECTED THE CARE-FREE SPIRIT OF FOLK DANCING IN ISRAEL?

A little bit. Unfortunately, it did. When Israel became a metropolitan country, there were a lot of side effects. Now Israel is "Westernizing", with the Rock thing. And with the war, not knowing when they will get to live, they just try to practice everything. They do the Rock, they do the crazy things, they wear hot-pants, they just want to be part of it.

DO THEY DANCE EVERY NIGHT AT THE KIBBUTZIM?

No. They used to, when I was there. Now, maybe Friday night. They move the chairs and tables from the mess hall. There are hundreds of people with live music and singing.

ARE CERTAIN DANCES DONE ON SPECIAL HOLIDAYS IN ISRAEL?

Yes, definitely. Like the Harvest Dances, the dances of the 'Bringing in of the Fruit', they have *Malu Asamenu Bar*. They come with the baskets, with the fruits. This they do, especially in the *kibbutzim*. They will also do *Mayim*, a happy dance, for Purim or when there is a new *Kibbutz*. There's a holiday for a new *Kibbutz*! No work!

DO YOU RECOMMEND BAREFOOT DANCING ON HARDWOOD FLOORS?

Hardwood floor is fine, but not hard cement. The ground is fine too, but the only thing, not cement.

DO YOU CURRENTLY TEACH A REGULAR SERIES OF DANCE?

Many, many. About 18 hours a week!

THANK YOU VERY MUCH!

You're very welcome!

