

# NEW DIRECTIONS FOR THE DANCE LIBRARY OF ISRAEL

by Pamela Kidron

In 1988 the Dance Library of Israel will celebrate its Bar Mitzvah. As the Library reaches maturity it is moving into new directions. From its original concept as a repository for duplicates of basic dance materials, the library is becoming a valuable center for original, one-of-a-kind documents. The library is also an increasingly important center for education in all subjects related to dance.

These new directions have developed for two reasons. Firstly, because there is a faithful support group based mainly in New York, which is closely connected to major figures in the dance world. This support group has been able to funnel important dance collections to the D.L.I.

These collections, together with original material collected under a Documentation of Dance in Israel Project begun two years ago, is turning the library into an internationally important source for unique archival dance material.

Secondly, with the initiation eight years ago of dance as a subject for matriculating high school students, and the increasing number of requests during the last three years for lectures on dance, the library is taking on an education-oriented character to meet the growing needs of the country. In order to accommodate the valuable collections, and to facilitate their use by the public and by scholars, the library will be moving in the spring of 1988 from its present cramped quarters in Bialik Street to a new, one hundred and sixty square meter space, in Beit Ariela, the Central Municipal Library building, facing the plaza of the Tel Aviv Museum. The new space is being specially designed with humidity controls and air conditioning to protect films, slides and videos. There will be viewing tables and listening areas. Cataloguing will be computerized. Plans are also afoot for expanding the staff of the library. The Dance Library of Israel is on a wave of rapid expansion.

## **HISTORY OF THE D.L.I.: 'Hang Your Costumes in the Kitchen'**

The idea of starting a dance library in Israel originated

with New York dancer Anne Wilson. Invited by the Histadruth for a kibbutz concert-lecture tour, she first came to Israel in 1968. Meeting the dancers here Anne was galvanized into helping fill the desperate need for dance resources. "It was a challenge," Anne reminisces. "The conditions were — hang your costumes in the kitchen, pull on your tights behind the breadslicer, and then create Romantic Ballet in the dining hall.

"Everywhere I went the dancers said to me, 'We need barres, a wooden floor, tape recorders, everything' — Yes, they needed everything, but above all they needed to know what the rest of the dance world was doing, and had done. What they really needed most, I thought, was a library of dance. I myself had relied on the Lincoln Center Dance Collection to build my own performance programmes."

Anne Wilson returned to Israel the following year and began to check out existing dance materials. "There was very little for the general public," she relates. "The Rubin Academy had some books, and so did the Hebrew University Library, and there were some private collections. The Tel Aviv public library had two copies of one source book on dance. It was written in German."

Using her private collection as a basis, Wilson officially founded the Dance Library of Israel in 1975. Zvi Avni, the composer, then Curator of the Music Library, welcomed in the dance collection. The Targ Foundation became its umbrella for contributors. "I simply shipped my own books to Bialik Street", says Wilson. "They would have stayed in packing boxes on the floor if it had not been for the initiative of Yemmy Strumm and Judith Brin-Ingber who not only put the books up on shelves but saw to it that the whole operation got going."

The Dance Library later came under the foundation umbrella of the America-Israel Cultural Foundation, and finally, in 1982 it became a not-for-profit organization, incorporated in the State of New York, and a registered non-profit organization in Israel. The International Committee for the Dance Library of Israel is structured with a Board of Directors and Executive Officers as well as a list of Artistic Consultants. The main

purposes of the international support structure is to collect materials and to raise funds. The list of Artistic Consultants is long and impressive, with names like Agnes de Mille, Robert Joffrey, Merce Cunningham, and many others. "To secure these Artistic Consultants," says Wilson, "We just looked up all the people we knew," referring blithely to all the major dance figures in New York, "and sent them a letter." Although all the people on the list are not necessarily active, using star power has proven an effective fundraising strategy.

In Israel, the library "shares" several librarians with the music section on the lower floor of the building. The archives, videos, and special materials are cared for by special librarian Gila Toledano, formerly general manager of the Inbal Dance Theatre. Two researchers, Shalom Hermon, and Dr. Zvi Friedhaber, are employed in the Documents Project, and Giora Manor, well known writer on theatre and dance, serves as overall Adviser. The library is supported by public funds coming from the Municipality of Tel Aviv and the Ministry of Education of the State of Israel, and by private funds coming from the International Committee, the America-Israel Cultural Foundation, and private donors.

### **NEW COLLECTIONS: Earning the Prize**

Thanks to personal and professional connections of members of the International Committee, several important dance collections have been acquired by the D.L.I. "Estelle Sommers, Chair — U.S.A., worked carefully and long in New York to acquire the vast collection of Rebecca Harkness," explains Wilson. "She went to the lawyers of the Harkness estate and spent many hours convincing them to give us the collection. Eighty eight boxes are now here in storage at Beit Ariela. We haven't opened them yet. They will be unpacked and catalogued after the move. But we do know that they contain important books, records and scores."

Ann Barzel, dance critic of the Chicago Tribune, and a long time friend of Wilson and Sommers, found it completely natural to offer her collection to D.L.I., although it was much sought after by other dance libraries. "This is a real feather in our cap," says Wilson. "We have already received fourteen cases of the Barzel gift. It includes treasures of original material such as films Ann took of the Ballet Russe from backstage in the 1930's, rare clips of Massine and Danilova, and all those other legendary Russian expatriates. Other living dancers and writers who have bequeathed their collections to us

include Anna Sokolow, Pearl Lang, Pauline Koner, Ruthanna Boris and Judith Brin-Ingber."

Israeli dancers whose materials have already come into the Library include Gurit Kadman, Sara Levi-Tanai, Baruch Agadati, Gertrud Kraus, Rina Nikova, Mia Arbatova, Tehila Roessler, Rivka Sturman and many more of the pioneers of dance in Israel.

### **A DETECTIVE STORY: Documenting Dance in Israel**

Two years ago the Ministry of Education and Culture asked the Dance Library to document dance in Israel — artistic, ethnic, and folk dance from the beginnings in the 20's until the present time. The project's researcher is Dr. Zvi Friedhaber.

The first stage of the documentation project, covering the 20's through the 40's will be completed this year.

The second stage will document the dance companies; the third stage will cover contemporary artists and creators; the fourth, ethnic dance; and the fifth, folk dance. For researcher Friedhaber the work has not always been easy. "The dance pioneers who are still alive are very old, in their seventies and eighties," says Friedhaber. "Many have died and our research has involved tracking down family, friends, and former pupils. Some of the work on the project developed like a real detective story." After many months of fruitless searching for links to the late Tel Aviv dance teacher Tehila Roessler, for example, a chance meeting with Roessler's former studio accompanist brought Friedhaber in touch with the dancer's sister and niece.

Two suitcases were unearthed with a treasure trove of material. A manuscript of Roessler's autobiography was found with entries describing her personal relationship with Franz Kafka, her dance studies with Gret Palucca (in Germany), as well as programmes of dance performances in Tel Aviv.

"We were able to reconstruct the whole period before she came to Israel," notes Toledano, who works closely with the researchers at the library, "as well as the period of dance here in Israel. We are working on that material now."

Material collected during the project is carefully arranged in folders and boxes with the assistance of the

chief archivist of the Israel National Archive. Only a small portion has yet been catalogued, the main emphasis having been on preservation, but eventually it will all be available for study by the interested public.

Anne Wilson is emphatic in pointing out the significance of the original Israeli materials, and the collections which are coming in from all over the world. "We are moving on," she says, "from being exclusively a service organization based mainly on copies of already existing references. We are becoming an international dance source to which scholars will be turning in order to do basic research from the originals. We are moving from duplicates to originals."

Librarian Toledano acknowledges that she concentrates mostly on the archival materials for the moment. These are building up at a rapid rate.

Students who need information contained in the library's 3,000 books are referred to the card catalogue on the first floor, where the dance books are available along with books on music.

But Toledano's energy has also been focused on a barrage of requests for explaining about dance to a growing body of student visitors to the library, seeking lectures, scholarly assistance, and help in performance-oriented dance projects as well as written papers.

### **ARAB WEDDING AND JEWISH MOTHERS: High School Matriculation Projects**

Eight years ago Supervisor of Dance Education in the Schools, Shalom Hermon, instigated a program in which students could choose to do a final dance project in place of one examination subject for their high school matriculation. This meant either original choreography, or a written paper or both. "Most of the dance project students go through the library," says Hermon. "It's the only place for them to find the books and other resources."

Toledano says, however, that very few students come to the library with a clear idea in mind. "I begin by helping them choose the idea," she says. "I show them how to outline the ideas, and I direct them to materials." This year twenty eight high school students are preparing matriculation dance projects. The themes range from

"Diaghilev and his Contribution to Dance" and "Under the Inspiration of Nijinsky" to "An Arab Wedding Ceremony" and "The Jewish Mother in the Holocaust."

"There are fewer students doing projects on ethnic dance," notes Toledano, "because there is just not enough written material for them to work with here at the library, something we are trying to remedy."

### **TELL ME ABOUT DANCE: Lectures to Visiting Groups**

Another unique activity of the library which has grown because of demand, is lectures to visiting groups. In 1987 twenty groups (some six hundred people) attended these lectures.

"When I came to work here three years ago," explains Toledano, "Many school teachers came to me and said, 'I want to bring my kids here.' When I asked them what they wanted to see they didn't have any specific idea. Instead of giving them a mixed salad of things, I began to ask about the age of the children and special interests. And so I began to give the teachers ideas until they said, 'Well then you give the lecture'."

Lectures today are given with videotapes. They center on general explanations about dance. A dance teacher from a private studio in the Tel Aviv area, for example, recently arrived with a group of eight to thirteen year old students, and Toledano was asked to speak on the historical development of dance. Toledano shows videos, asks questions, and often stops the show in the middle to make sure the students understand her. "The teachers may not have the tools and knowledge themselves for educating children in dance, but they certainly have the desire." Anne Wilson has devised a special video program with narration in Hebrew or Arabic, dealing with story ballets for use in schools as well as at library lectures.

The D.L.I. has also been active as a publisher of dance books and the Israel Dance Annual, edited by Giora Manor.

"It's been a number of years since I dressed behind the bread slicer," says Anne Wilson. "But my crazy triptich dream of dance/books/Israel has really come true. The D.L.I. has come of age." ■