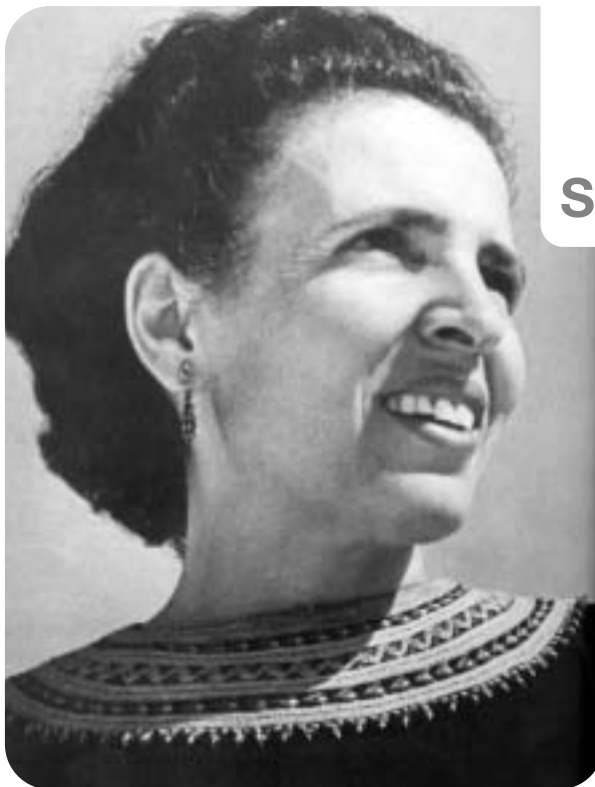


Words for Sara and Giora

Ruth Eshel



Sara Levi-Tanai 1910-2005

The choreographer Sara Levi-Tanai passed away just before the beginning of the new year. She was 95. If any person can be spoken of as a national cultural asset, it is Levi-Tanai. She was an artist of many talents - writer, composer, director. Above all, her lifework was the Inbal Dance Theater, which she founded in 1949 and to which she had dedicated herself for over forty years. In 1973 she was awarded the Israel Prize for Dance. In the 1950s, when the standard magic word was "melting-pot", Levi-Tanai chose to go against the flow. She realized that each ethnic group must foster and preserve its own tradition, as part of the rich mosaic of a new culture in progress. In the 1960s, when artistic dance in Israel adopted and imitated Graham's modern dance, Levi-Tanai, who had no professional background in dance, dared to create a different kind of dance, with an original movement language and dealing with subject-matter related to Yemenite folklore, the Bible, Jewish tradition and Israel's geographic and human landscape. In the 1950s and 60s there were well known folkloric dance companies around the world, among them Igor Moiseyev's Russian

company, the Ballet Folklorico from Mexico and others. In most cases, such companies turned to folk dancing, adapting it to the stage. In Israel, as far back as the 1920s and 30s, Baruch Agadati and Rina Nikova tried to create artistic dances inspired by Yemenite ethnicity, which they saw as a representation of ancient Jews, but their creations were mostly works of exotic dance. Sara Levi-Tanai did not seek to preserve folklore, but rather to be inspired as an artist by her ethnic group's cultural origins as well as by other ethnic groups, including Arab culture. In a 1981 lecture she said: "Beautiful, splendid classical ballet did not meet my expressive needs. The straight lines were foreign to my spirit and disrupted my view. I missed the subtle curlicues that were familiar to me from the movement, singing, embroidery, jewelry and all the rich ornamentation of Eastern art". She did not settle for re-arranging folkloric materials and adapting them to the stage, as was the norm, but dismantled the movement phrases in order to isolate the "single building blocks", compiling them into a movement vocabulary. During the first years she created short dances, which she regarded as studies, and these served as the basis for various works over the years. Only in 1961 did she create a long work, "The Story of Ruth" - which was, in fact, an entire program.

Levi-Tanai had at her disposal several distinctive steps and movement motifs, such as "Da'asa" (a light, supple step, which she likened to "sinking in sand"), as well as several characteristics of Yemenite dance, including the dancers' improvisational capacity, their distinct dynamic of impulses and twists, and the upwards and downwards coiling movements, like oriental ornamentation. All of these she took apart and reassembled, like a Picasso painting. She collaborated with artists such as Anatol Gurevich, Dani Karavan and David Sharir in creating sets and costumes, and with the musicians Ovadia Tuvia, Avraham Elam Amzaleg, Uria Boskovitz, Mordechai Setter, Gary Bertini and others. In her dozens of years of creation, an enriching dialogue developed between the dances and the expanding movement vocabulary - and thus Inbal's movement language came into being.

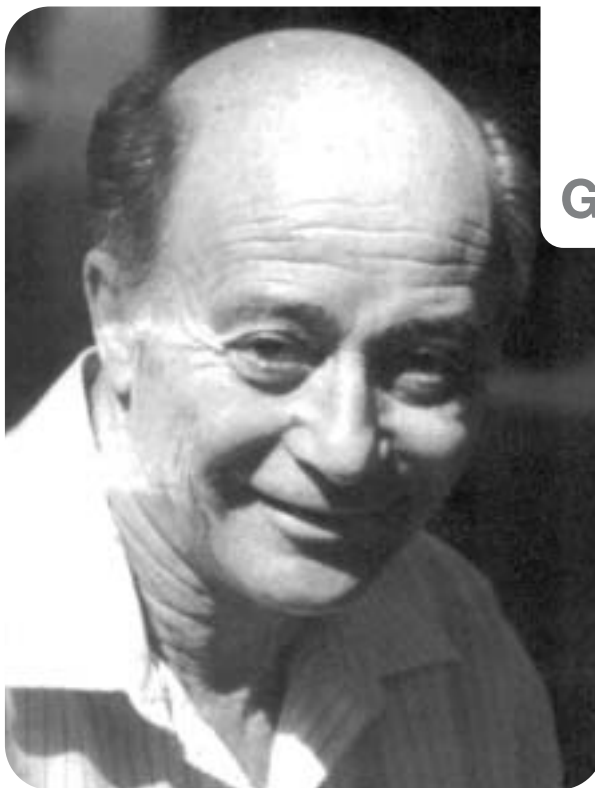
In Inbal's first years the company came under criticism, especially by Yemenites who claimed that what Levi-Tanai was creating was not actually Yemenite dance, being too modern, while most modern and classical ballet dancers mistook it for a folklore group and therefore found it uninteresting. Inbal's greatest success, among audiences and critics alike, was in its tours abroad, where it represented the best of the new Israeli nation - a combination of new and old. While it captivated

the overseas public, there was some disapproval in Israel of the identification of artistic Israeli dance with the company of one small ethnic group.

Sara Levi-Tanai created masterpieces such as "Yemenite Wedding" (1956), "Shabat Shalom" (1956), "Desert" (1958), "The Story of Ruth" (1961), "Song of Songs" (1982), "Winged Letters" (1988), and "The Well" (1989). She had educated generations of dancers, including Margalit Oved, Hadassa Baduch, Yehuda Cohen, Racheli Sela, Meir Ovadia, Moshiko Yitzhak-Halo, Sara Zagreb, and Ilana Cohen, who is now Inbal's artistic director. Inbal dancers who wished to develop as creators, however, had to leave the company. Only under pressure from artistic committees did Levi-Tanai agree to open the company to "outside" creators.

Today, when there is an abundance of dance creators in Israel, not only have Levi-Tanai's contribution and uniqueness not lost their sheen - they are doubly notable. She has contributed a model of correct work to Israeli dance, a combination of tradition and renewal, and has given us masterpieces, some of which can be seen to this day at the Ethnic Multicultural Center Inbal.

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Giora Manor

1926-2005

For over fifty years, critic and dance researcher Giora Manor had accompanied with great love the development of dance in Israel, laid the foundations for writing about it and encouraged many of its creators. He died after a grave illness at the age of 79.

Giora Manor was born in Prague in 1926 to a wealthy family of merchants. When Czechoslovakia was occupied by Nazi Germany, they purchased a piece of land in Yokne'am, intending to immigrate to Palestine. In 1939, the 13 year old boy arrived at Kibbutz Mishmar Ha'emek, ahead of his family. He was followed by a large container filled with furniture, but not by his parents and baby sister - who had been sent to an extermination camp. The Kibbutz became his home until his dying day.

His first love was the theater, and he participated in the play "He Walked in the Fields" at the Kameri Theater. He joined the IDF Nahal (Pioneering Youth) Unit and initiated the establishment of the Nahal Troupe, becoming its first commander. Later, he directed and taught at the Beit Zvi Stage Arts School, directed radio plays for Kol Israel radio station and became the station's theater critic. In

1970, after twenty years of theater direction, he decided that he no longer wished to direct; he was sick of the disciplinary issues and the tensions of the profession, he said. He started writing for Al Hamishmar daily newspaper - on dance, of all things. At the time, Dov Bar-Nir was the paper's theater critic, and it was deemed unnecessary to have two theater critics. Thus, Manor was asked to write on experimental performances, and particularly on dance; thus, by chance, he arrived at what was to become his main life's work.

In 1975 he was asked to write about dance for Dvar Hashavua, and then decided that it was about time for Israeli dance to have its own professional magazine - founding the annual magazine Israel Dance (published from 1975 to 1990) together with Judy Ingber and Gila Toledano. The magazine documented dance in Israel at a time when it was turning from a marginal art-form to an avant-garde one. Later, he founded the quarterly "Israel Dance" (published from 1993 to 1998), which we co-edited. In 1979 he initiated an international conference in Jerusalem on "The Bible in Dance", and edited The Gospel According to Dance (1980) - a book on the subject (published in the US by Dance Magazine), for which he also wrote the main text. Giora Manor had become the "spokesperson" of Israeli dance abroad, and

his texts started appearing regularly in magazines published in English and German around the world. He had a talent for forming ties with the leading figures of global dance, cultivating them for years, and many of them became his close friends.

Manor was an autodidact, whose extensive knowledge of dance was self-taught. His theatrical knowledge broadened his outlook (eventually, he was also Al Hamishmar's theater critic, until the newspaper closed down). He was one of the founders of the Dance Library of Israel and published seven books, including his biography, The Best of Times, The Worst of Times (1996). Among his books on dance were: Agadati - the Pioneer of Modern Dance in Israel (1986), The Life and Dance of Gertrud Kraus (1988), and Sara's Way: Sara Levi-Tanai and her Choreography (2002). For the past decade he wrote regularly for DanceToday, the Dance Magazine of Israel and was the dance critic for Yaron Margolin's Web-site, www.israeldance.co.il.

At the time of his death, two other finished books were awaiting a publisher: Those Who Did Not Dance, about key figures in dance who did not dance themselves and yet propelled the dance world forward, such as Serge Diaghilev and Batsheva de Rothschild (he also published an article on this subject in DanceToday no. 11), and a book on dance

in ancient Egypt (an article on this subject was intended for publication in DanceToday no. 12, but remains unfinished).

Some personal words are also necessary here. Practically my entire career - as a dancer, choreographer, dance researcher and critic - has to do with Giora. I owe him a lot. As he was being buried in the Kibbutz cemetery, I wanted to eulogize him, to speak about his generosity, his friendship, knowledge, love of dance... In my study, I keep a large framed photograph of him, and the books he left me; I know he's there, in the room.