

BATSHEVA DE ROTHSCHILD 1914 - 1999

Giora Manor



Baroness Batsheva de Rothschild
הברונית בת-שבט דה רוטשילד

Batsheva de Rothschild, scion of the famous Jewish banking family, was born in London in 1914. She grew up in Paris and studied biology at the Sorbonne, but was always passionately interested in the arts – especially dance.

Batsheva de Rothschild managed to escape to New York prior to the Nazi occupation of France. In the mid 1940s she enrolled as a dance student in the Martha Graham school. At that time, Graham used to present her company at a special annual season in New York. One year, when there were insufficient funds to finance Graham's season, de Rothschild simply donated the necessary sum.

Graham and de Rothschild became close friends. In 1956, when the State Department sent Graham's dance company on a world tour, which ended in Israel, de Rothschild joined her troupe. During the 1950s, she visited Israel several times and then finally decided to settle in Tel-Aviv.

Batsheva de Rothschild founded her Foundation for the Arts and Science and financed both productions and the studies abroad of many of the young dancers and choreographers in Israel, among them Rina Schenfeld and Moshe Efrati. In 1963, she decided it was the right time for a professional dance company to be established. With the active help of Graham (and several of her dancers), the Batsheva Dance Company began to prepare its premiere, which took place late in 1964. It was an instant success because of the lively

stage presence and panache of the Israeli dancers, who excelled in the Graham works as well as in other choreographers' creations.

Four years later, owing to the refusal by some of the chief dancers of the Batsheva Dance company to accept the founder's wish to appoint a newly arrived ballet dancer from South Africa, Jeannette Ordman, as artistic director, Batsheva de Rothschild decided to found another modern dance company, specifically for Ordman as director and a featured dancer. The Bat-Dor company began performing in 1967.

In the early 1970s, de Rothschild announced her decision to merge her two companies. This would have meant the end of the Batsheva company's existence, but public reaction both in Israel and abroad led to the Batsheva company's becoming a publicly supported dance company.

Throughout this period, Baroness de Rothschild – who hated being addressed by her aristocratic title – was active as a "producer" of the Bat-Dor company. In the summer of 1998, Bat-Dor held a gala performance in her honor. She also continued to support science education as well as folklore arts through her foundation. In 1989, de Rothschild received the prestigious Israel Prize for her contribution to culture in Israel. ❖❖