

לקת בת-דור ב"פריזמה" מאת מירליה שרון, צילום: מולה הרמתי
Bat Dor company in "Prisma" by Mirali Sharon, photograph: Mula & Haramaty



Giora Manor


Bat-Dor Faces the Future with Hope and Apprehension

Bat-Dor Dance Company resumed performing in May 2000, after not appearing on stage for several months. The hiatus in its performances was caused by complicated legal transactions, following the demise of the company's founder and producer, Batsheva de Rothschild, in 1999. But even prior to de Rothschild's death, some difficult questions had to be faced by the Artistic Director of the company and its school, Jeannette Ordman. Changes in Bat-Dor's direction as well as its artistic policy were overdue in order to save the institution from closing down.

As a popular Hebrew song has it, "It isn't nice to see a closed kindergarten..." The resuming of rehearsals and performances with only a dozen dancers (there were more than 20 before the company's activities came to a stop) and the changes in management are a positive development. Moshe Goldberg, a former dancer of the company, who has been working for the last ten years with one of the leading impresarios in Israel, was appointed General Manager. Another former dancer of the company, Yaakov Slivkin, who has worked for many years in London, is the new Chief Administrator of the company and of its excellent school - a dance school which has supplied Israel's dance companies with most of their professional dancers in the past 30 years. The Artistic Head of the Bat-Dor school is now Anja Brud, also a former soloist of Bat-Dor, who recently served as Artistic Director of the Kibbutz Contemporary Dance Young Group. Among the senior teachers of the school will be Yaakov Slivkin and Liat Steiner, the latter a former dancer of Batsheva Dance Company.

During the recent Passover vacations, Bat-Dor held a workshop, in which approximately 40 students participated. The faculty consisted of Barak Marshall, Angelin Preljokaj, Naomi Perlov, Anja Brud and the Israeli Stomp company, "Mayumana", which stimulated the rhythmical creativity of the students. Bat-Dor plans a summer course, in which the well-known American ballet teachers Richard Gibson and Larry Rhodes will teach and Eduardo Vilaro, a former dancer of the Alwin Ailey company and school, will conduct modern dance classes.

However, the pedagogical aspect of Bat-Dor's activities - although it is a very important one - isn't the company's most difficult problem. The real dilemmas the company faces relate to what works will constitute the company's artistic repertory; which choreographers will be invited to create for it; and in what ways will Bat-Dor be special and different from other Israeli dance companies.



Bat-Dor has many excellent works on its list (as well as admirable costumes, lighting and music), which have become modern classics. Such are "Blue Skin" by Jiri Kylian, "In & Out" by Hans van Manen, Lar Lubovitch's important first work, which he created for Bat-Dor in the early 1970s, "Whirligogs", or Tudor's "Dark Elegies". One hopes that some of these masterpieces will be taken out of the mothballs and presented again, giving young (as well as mature) dance audiences a chance to see them live, not only on the tiny VCR screen.

In the past, several excellent contemporary choreographers, such as Gigi Caciuleanu, Ed Wubbe (the present Artistic Director of Scapino in Rotterdam), have worked for Bat-Dor. If the company is to survive and make its fare tasty to the audiences, it must invite up-and-coming talented choreographers from Israel as well as from abroad. The low-calorie confections of recent past years should be replaced by programs of more substantial artistic fare.

The newly appointed Chairman of the Board, Yossi Frenkel, had served for many years as the company's public relations officer and was responsible for its once flourishing subscription-series, which he plans to rekindle. In that series, at least one famous company from abroad was included in every season. Unless the management and Jeannette Ordman herself change their modes of thinking, one may be sure that no official financial help will be forthcoming from the Ministry of Culture, support that the school and the company need and deserve.

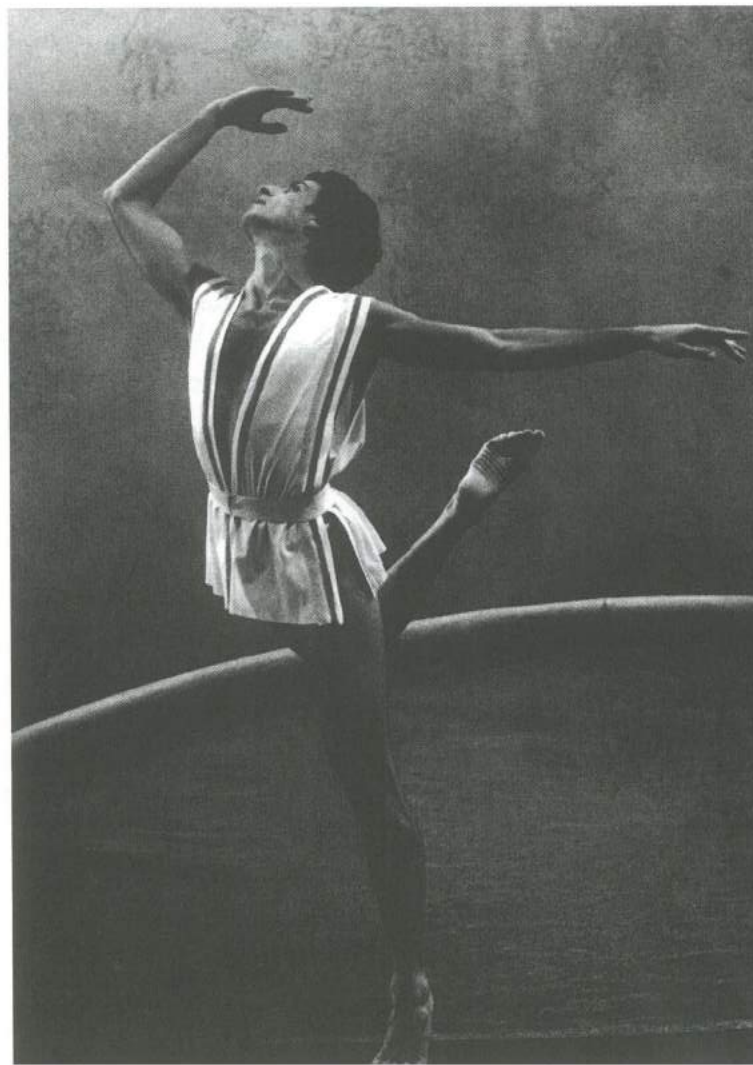
In May 2000, Bat-Dor presented a triple-bill, constituting its last program before the temporary stop to its activities. The most interesting work was, at least in my view, a rather dramatic treatment of a topic which is a veritable hot potato in Israel: the struggle between the ultra-religious ("Haredim") minority and the non-religious majority of Israelis. Tamir Ginz, the courageous young choreographer of "Epikouros" (a Greek word used in Hebrew to denote an atheist or a heretic) set out to deal with the rift between the "Haredim" and the non-religious Jews in terms of "Romeo and Juliet". A Yeshive student (danced by the very gifted young Yarden Ronen) falls in love with a girl, and his friends try to prevent the "unholy" romance by not quite peaceful means.

Another dance on the program was "Accord/Discord" by Igal Perry, a former dancer of the company, who for many years has been running a very successful dance school in New York. The accompanying music was a work commissioned from a young Israeli composer, Avner Dorman.

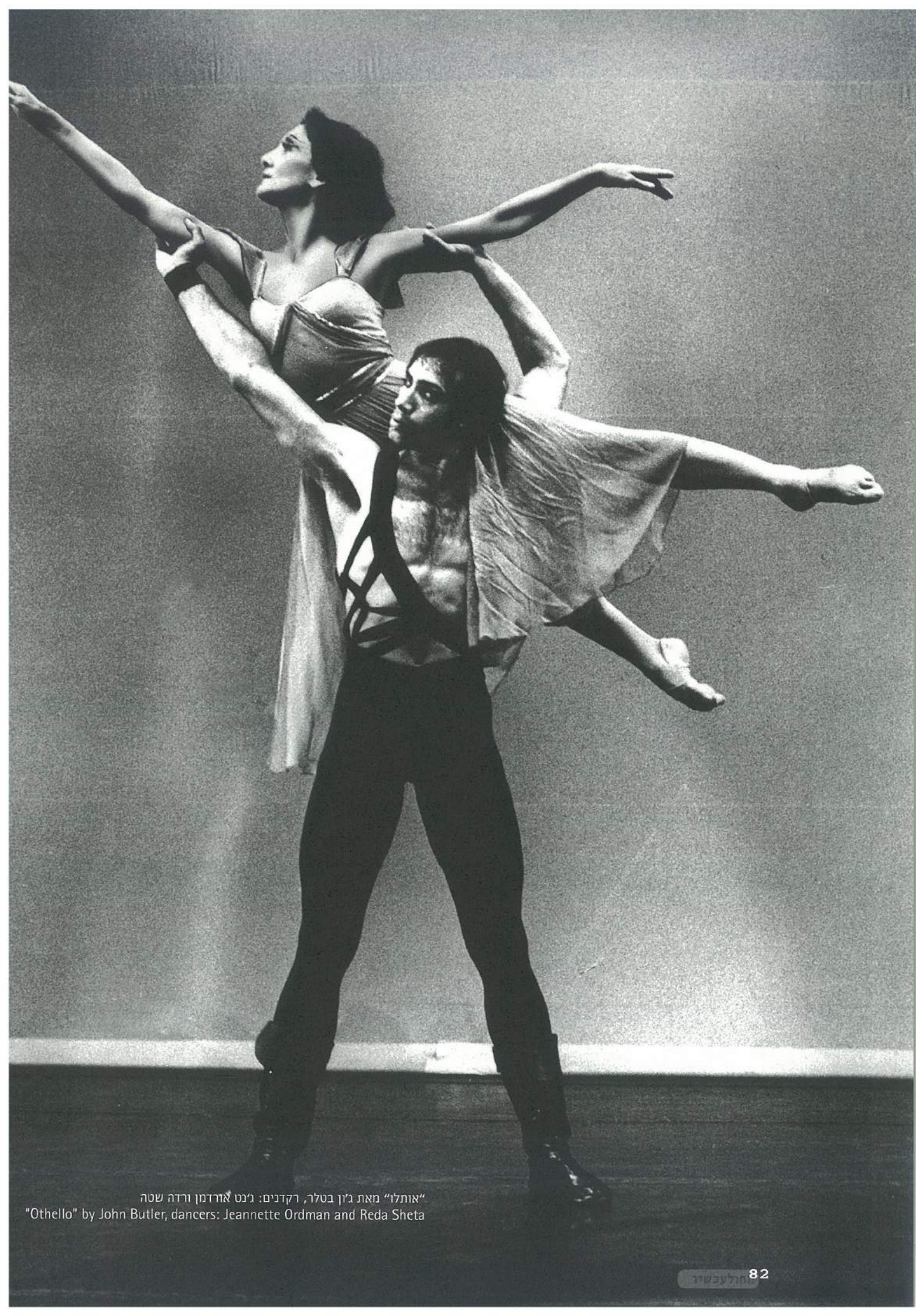
The evening ended with a colourful, very sweet dessert by Italian choreographer Liciano Cannito, fashionably named "www://bar...eee's.world net", which included amusements such as male dancers wearing tutus and even artificial bare bottoms. Altogether a lighthearted farrago of little consequence but quite enjoyable.

Bat-Dor performed in its own theatre and not in one of the large halls, which is, I believe, a step in the right direction. The new management faces the formidable task of engaging exciting young choreographers. Such talented dance creators exist in Israel. Bat-Dor is also looking abroad for innovative artists, who would enhance the company's appeal without over-stretching the modest means at its disposal.

Last year Bat-Dor was to celebrate its 30th season. As one may see from looking at the repertory list printed in the present issue of "Dance Today" has a rich history. The company knew both good and problematic times, and had its ups and downs throughout its long activity. In any case, the fact that the company is performing once again, even if in a reduced format, is certainly a positive development. All options are open; it all depends on whether Bat-Dor has learned something from its problematic past experience and will survive the demise of its founder to find new ways of functioning as a dance company and a dance school. Let's hope it will.



“בעל החלומות” מאת מירלה שרון, רקדן: דויד רפפורט
"The Dreamer" by Mirali Sharon, dancer: David Rapoport



"אותלו" מאת ג'ון בטר, רקדנים: ג'נט אורדמן ורדה שטה
"Othello" by John Butler, dancers: Jeannette Ordman and Reda Sheta