

BATSHEVA

THE FLAGSHIP OF MODERN DANCE IN ISRAEL

AN ATTEMPT TO TRACE THE ARTISTIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE
COMPANY THROUGH 30 YEARS OF TURBULENT CREATION

B Y G I O R A M A N O R

The first appearance of Batsheva Dance Company on the Israeli dance stage in December 1964 was a pleasant surprise and at the same time the result of a process of development, which lasted for many years. The company, which was founded in the previous year by Baroness Batsheva de Rothschild, in cooperation with her close friend, the great choreographer Martha Graham, was the culmination of the process of "Americanization" of Israeli modern dance. This development began in the early 1950s, soon after the declaration of independence of the State of Israel, when several American-trained dancers, such as Rena Gluck and Rina Shaham arrived and settled in the country. All were graduates of the Graham school.

The company, which was founded in the previous year by Baroness Batsheva de Rothschild, in cooperation with her close friend, the great choreographer Martha Graham, was the culmination of the process of "Americanization" of Israeli modern dance

However, it was Anna Sokolow who was invited to work in Israel at the Inbal Dance Theatre in the mid-1950s, and for the first time Israeli dance artists were offered a substantial opportunity to experience and participate in the already established, "classical" American modern dance works, such as her "Rooms" (1955) or "Dreams" (1961). Sokolow returned each year, for a visit lasting several months, to organize groups of young dancers in performances of her works in the framework of the "Lyric Theatre" which she founded in Tel-Aviv.

Sokolow herself, a former dancer in Graham's first company in New York in the 1930s and a brilliant choreographer in her own right, used movement based on Graham's methods and movement language in her own vocabulary. In Sokolow's "Lyric Theatre" dancers were to become the nucleus of the Batsheva Dance Company. Most of them were introduced to the Graham style through their work with Sokolow with the exception of Rina Schoenfeld, Moshe Efrati, Oshra Elkayam and Ahuva Inbari who went to study in New York, at the Graham studio or at Julliard. They were all recipients of grants by de Rothschild or the America-Israel Cultural Foundation. The Israeli public was already familiar with Graham's work. Her

company toured Israel in the mid-1950s. These performances were a mindboggling experience and carried an enormous artistic, as well as emotional impact.

Batsheva's repertory in its first season (1964-5) comprised some of Graham's best known works, such as the duets "Errand into the Maze" and "Herodiade", and two of her major creations, "Diversion of Angels" and "Embattled Garden".

It was not the encounter with a new style and movement language which caused such a tremendous impact, but rather the strong, radiant

stage personalities of the Israeli dancers. They imbued the Graham choreography with extraordinary determination and elan, hiding, so to speak, the statuesque and symbolic character of many of her dances behind the radiant energy of their unpolished, but exuberant dancing.

For three decades there hardly had been any male dancers participating in the work of the modern dance choreographers in Israel. It was therefore a real surprise to see the very strong contingent of men de Rothschild had succeeded in finding for her company in a country, where due to the lack of male dancers, the taller women in companies such as that of Gertrud Kraus, had to dance "en travestie" when the subject matter demanded male characters.

What the male dancers of the original Batsheva group lacked in technical proficiency and finesse, was compensated for by their ambitious, not to say aggressive "hutzpa", so typical of Israeli-born "sabres". Their huge egos made the work of visiting choreographers very difficult but their performances on-stage were exuberant and electrifying.

In contrast, the women in the company possessed good techniques and most of them were well versed in the Graham technique and style. They too, just as their male colleagues, had strong stage personalities and were as ambitious as the men.

Another innovation - in Israeli terms - which was brought about by de Rothschild, was professionalism. Up to the founding of Batsheva, the dancers (of both genders) who had finished their studies at the studios, both in ballet and modern dance, had the meager choice of either becoming teachers or seeking employment abroad if they wished to pursue a career in dance. At that time all stage dance in Israel was on a voluntary, ad hoc and hence unpaid basis.

The close relationship between de Rothschild and Graham began when Batsheva, after fleeing from her ancestral home in Paris when France was occupied by the Nazis at the beginning of the Second World War, arrived in New-York and enrolled in Graham's studio. She did not excel in dance, but apart from writing a book, in French, about the history of modern dance, was able and willing to underwrite Graham's annual seasons in New-York with her own private fortune.

In the 1950s, de Rothschild discovered Israel and became interested in the young state. Thus, she followed the tradition of her family in donating and investing parts of the Rothschild fortune in Zionist endeavours.

She decided to found her dance company in Israel and offered the post of artistic director to Robert Cohan, one of the leading dancers of Graham's company. De Rothschild insisted on paying all employees salaries on an Israeli scale, which could not be compared with what

was the standard in the USA. Cohan did not find such a reduction in remuneration acceptable and did not accept the offer. He often came to Israel, creating dances for Batsheva and Bat-Dor. He later served (during the 1980s) as artistic adviser for the Batsheva company.

About a year prior to the commencement of rehearsals in Tel Aviv, the preparations had started in New York. Graham agreed to lead the Batsheva dancers in their first season and decided to let them perform several of her best known works - a favour no other company, save her own, was ever granted. This was Graham's way of repaying her debt to de Rothschild.

Batsheva received the ultimate accolade and approval when in 1970 and again in 1972 toured in America and brought to New-York, the home turf of Graham, her well-known masterpieces

Graham's dancers were instructed to teach their Israeli colleagues, sent to New-York by de Rothschild, their roles. But they didn't relish the idea of creating competition for themselves. So they were not too cooperative, and rehearsing was a difficult process, as the Graham dancers simply gave their Israeli counterparts rehearsal films and told them to learn the steps on their own, this was not easy at all, as the films were not always unequivocal and in any case showed the movements from the view point of the audience. The students had to reverse left and right to get the moves right.

From New York to Tel Aviv and back

After the Israeli dancers returned from New York, they were joined by those chosen during auditions held at Mia Arbatova's studio. Several dancers from Graham's company arrived to work with them, among them Robert Cohan, Ethel Winter and the independent choreographer Donald Mckyle.

Ruth Harris, a dancer born in Germany was appointed rehearsal director. She was a former dancer in Kurt Jooss' company and an expert on jazz dance. She had a pleasant personality, but little influence on artistic policy and confined herself to the scheduling of classes and rehearsals. Francois Shapiro was appointed as the first administrative manager. Batsheva de Rothschild herself was always listed in the programs as "producer". In all but title, Martha Graham served as artistic director.

Graham would visit Israel several times a year. Emotionally it wasn't an easy task for her to transfer her own roles to young dancers. One of Graham's dancers who became very important in implementing the transfer of Graham's works to the Batsheva company was Linda Hodes. Though of Jewish extraction, she had never been interested in Israel or Zionism and did not contemplate living in Israel. However, when she was asked to come and teach in Tel-Aviv, she accepted. She met one of the Batsheva dancers, Ehud Ben-David, and they decided to marry. Linda Hodes stayed and lived in Israel until the 1970s.

"Martha asked me to go and teach her 'Embattled Garden' and 'Diversion of Angels', which was no easy task, as the Israeli dancers were so different from the American dancers. And not only in the qualities of their movement, but also in their attitude towards work

methods and discipline. Or rather the lack of discipline..." - Linda Hodes recalls.

In this respect she is corroborated by all the other guest teachers and choreographers who came to work with the new company. Each remark or correction would result in a fierce and loud general discussion - in Hebrew of course, so that the teachers or choreographers from abroad could not follow the argument.

One of the striking characteristics of the early seasons of Batsheva, was the encouragement given to the dancers to create their own works. Already during the 1965 season the company performed Rina Schoenfeld's "Japhta's Daughter" (music by: Mordecai Seter) as well as Oshra Elkayam's humorous "Adam and Eve". A year later the repertory included Rena Gluck's "Women in a Tent" (music by Mordecai Seter), "David and Goliath" by Oshra Elkayam and works by Shimon Braun and Ehud Ben-David.

In the early years of modern dance in Israel, from the 1920s to the 1940s, it was at the forefront of the avant-garde of European modern dance. In the 1950s it became apparent that the development which in the meanwhile had taken place in America, made Israeli modern dance obsolete and passé.

The arrival of Martha Graham and the foundation of Batsheva Company brought Israeli modern dance once more to the cutting edge of contemporary dance.

Batsheva received the ultimate accolade and approval when in 1970 and again in 1972 toured in America and brought to New-York, the home turf of Graham, her well-known masterpieces. The company was enthusiastically received by audience and critics alike. This was



"DREAM", CHOREOGRAPHY: MARTHA GRAHAM, DANCERS: EHUD BEN-DAVID, RENA GLUCK, OHAD NAHARIN

the peak of the company's first years. But it also became the starting point of a period of decline and confusion which was to bedevil the company for many years.

Batsheva again became an internationally acclaimed company and the bearer of an avant-garde of special style only about twenty years later, when Ohad Naharin became its chief choreographer and artistic director.

Two special aspects may be observed, in the first, Graham's oriented period of Batsheva's activity. The roster of famous choreographers who came to work with the company comprise some of the most acknowledged American as well as West European leading modern dance artists. It also included some modern classical ballet choreographers, for whom this was a first experience with a non-ballet based group.

Robert Cohan, who later became the company's artistic adviser, thought this to be an unique occurrence, even as compared to, for example, the Nederlands Dans Theatre in Holland, which is a modern company founded more or less parallel to Batsheva, and is of similar character.

The guest list of choreographers who worked for Batsheva in that period, included Jerome Robbins ("Moves"), Jose Limon ("The Exiles", "La Malinche"), Norman Morrice and Christopher Bruce (both British), as well as Talley Beatty, Donald McKyle, Glen Tetley (Americans) and several others. This period ended with Graham herself arriving to create new work on the Batsheva dancers and with John Cranko doing the choreography which was also one of his last works, "Ami-Yam-Ami-Ya'ar" for the Israeli company.

The second special phenomenon is that many of these guests chose music by Israeli composers for their new creations. Subsequently when they transferred this music to companies in other countries, they so-to-speak broadcasted Israeli music abroad, and on several occasions used additional Israeli music by composers, with whom they had encounters while working with Batsheva, in other countries.

For example, when Tetley was looking for a theme and music for what was to become one of his masterpieces and is still danced today by several companies, alas, not by Batsheva, "Mythical Hunters", he was overcome by the hills of Galilee and the wilderness of the Judean desert and found musical inspiration in Oeden Partos' composition. He again used Partos' music in his "Tehillim" ("Psalms") and that of Mordecai Seter in his "Ricerca". Seter's music served several times as the accompaniment of works by Graham, who also repeatedly collaborated with Israeli designer, Danni Karavan.

In 1968, when creating his choreography for "1-2-3", Norman Morrice chose another Israeli composer's music, that of Benzion Orgad. Members of the company who choreographed for it, naturally often turned to original Israeli music.

Each of these choreographers with whom I had the opportunity to talk, mentioned their work with Batsheva in that period as an "unforgettable experience". Most of them stated that this was not just an unmitigated pleasure, since working with the Batsheva originals was a tough job, but a worthwhile struggle nevertheless.

Once Jerome Robbins told me: "Usually I am known as a choreographer the dancers are afraid of. The only company which intimidated me, was Batsheva... The first Hebrew word I learned was: 'SHEKET!!!" (meaning "Quiet!").

Most of them emphasized the tremendous emotional involvement of the dancers in their work. That, together with the usual Israeli lack of discipline and every two Israeli having at least three strong opinions about any topic, turned many rehearsals into a stormy symposium. These heated discussions, were conducted naturally most of the time in Hebrew, and were of course quite unintelligible to the guest artists

from abroad.

Another aspect - both positive and negative - remarked upon by the choreographers I interviewed, was the remarkable freedom the Batsheva dancers granted themselves in adapting their roles to suit their strong facets and to obliterate their weaknesses, regardless of the moves and steps required by the choreographer. This identification with and adaptation to the dancer's character of the prescribed movements, made the work of the choreographer a nightmare, but also caused a marvellous fusion of the dancer with his part. The choreographer may have pulled his hair out in despair, but the audiences were enthusiastic and the work was a success in spite - or perhaps because of this process of "Batshevazition".

Norman Morrice cites Ehud Ben-David as the champion of this sort of "artistic freedom". I myself remember watching Morrice's "Percussion Concerto" (music by Leonardo Salzedo) on two separate occasions, once with Ehud Ben-David in the title role of the "odd-man-out" and at another time with another dancer. For Ehud Ben-David, this was his world and his dance, and the group of people who would not accept him as he was, was made to look like a bunch of hide-bound conservatives, unable to understand him. He made the character's faltering attempts to join the group look not as a result of his own inability to adapt, but rather as one of the group's shortcomings. This left him in "splendid isolation". When the other dancer was doing the part of the outsider - probably much closer to the choreographer's intentions - it became the sad predicament of the rejected one, the lonely individual who isn't accepted by his peers. Ehud Ben-David accomplished all this without actually changing the steps, just by a different approach and interpretation.

Crisis of mutual mistrust between the founder and her company

During the early stages of Batsheva's activities, Graham urged de Rothschild to give the dancers a daily class in classical ballet as well as in Graham technique.

At the Summer Course of the Rubin Academy in Jerusalem, de Rothschild met a ballet teacher who had recently arrived from South Africa via London, and who taught ballet at the course. The two immediately found a common language. Jeannette Ordman was much admired by de Rothschild, so it seemed quite obvious that Jeannette Ordman would be the one invited to teach the Batsheva dancers classical ballet techniques.

In those days Ordman hardly had any idea about what modern dance was all about. She had neither experience of European nor American Graham style. Being industrious, she joined the daily Graham technique classes and work hard on the floor exercises that she was unfamiliar with. At a certain point, Ordman asked if she could become Norman Morrice's assistant. He thought she was not experienced enough to deal with modern dance, and he told de Rothschild his opinion in no uncertain terms.

On the list of new works in the company's repertory of 1967 there appear two works, choreographed by Ordman, ("The Unanswered Question", "Run the Rig"). At a certain point, de Rothschild decided to make Ordman the artistic director, chief soloist and house choreographer of the company, in spite of fierce opposition to such a step by Martha Graham.

Graham did not think Ordman was talented and experienced enough to create for and run the company. But de Rothschild stuck to her

appointment. This brought about a rift and much mutual incriminations between the founder and her dancers.

The soloists of Batsheva were unwilling to accept Ordman as director and choreographer and when they realized de Rothschild was adamant, they more or less declared that they would resign and leave the company, if the Baroness would not change her decision. The leaders of the revolt were Moshe Efrati, Ehud Ben-David, Galia Gat and they were joined by most of the dancers. Just three years after its birth, the company was in danger of disintegration.

Batsheva passed the New-York examination with flying colours. Marcia Siegel, the eminent critic wrote: "It's always a pleasure to see good choreography by a new set of dancers, and this company gave additional dimension to all the oldies I saw".

Robert Cohan claims, that it was he who suggested to de Rothschild a possible solution to the impasse. He proposed the foundation of another company, in which Ordman would be free to create and perform according to her wishes and taste.

Thus the Bat-Dor company came into being.

The ultimate test: New-York

About five years after the first première, the moment of truth arrived for Batsheva: the decision to tour America and to perform in New-York. Was it just bringing coal to Newcastle or a fool-hardy attempt to play on Graham's home turf, in front of the world's most discerning critics?

The company was to perform well-known works by Graham, danced by young, relatively unknown Israeli artists. At the beginning of the 1970s New-York was the undisputed world capital of modern dance and its dance critics were the most feared arbitrators of taste.

The Batsheva repertory on its first tour in the U.S.A in 1970, comprized "Errand Into the Maze", "Diversion of Angels" by Graham, Tetley's "Mythical Hunters", Jerome Robbins' "Moves" and "The Exiles" by Jose Limon. Some of the best works by contemporary modern choreographers. The programs also included several works by Israelis, such as Moshe Efrati, Rena Gluck and Rina Schoenfeld, the three chief choreographers amongst the company members.

Batsheva passed the New-York examination with flying colours. Marcia Siegel, the eminent critic wrote:

"It's always a pleasure to see good choreography by a new set of dancers, and this company gave additional dimension to all the oldies I saw. Jerome Robbins' 'Moves' is on point by the Joffrey Ballet and that company is far better equipped to tackle its movement difficulties. But what Batsheva lacks in technique it supplies in theatre intelligence. They do 'Moves' not as an enigmatic ritual but as drama. They performed Graham's 'Diversion of Angels' and Jose Limon's 'The Exiles' with similar vibrancy." (Boston Herald, 27.10.70). And Clive Barnes, then chief dance critic of "The New York Times: wrote:

"These are the Israeli children of American dance. [...] let us take the revivals first, for even here the special accent of the Batsheva Company - sharp, bright almost aggressive in its dancing - was brilliantly evident." (9.12.70).

During a later European tour, two of the company's main dancers, Rina Schoenfeld and Ehud Ben-David, were awarded prizes at an international dance festival in Paris, France.

During this period of consolidating its international standing and, so to speak, playing in the world league of modern dance, Batsheva knew little tranquillity at home. Artistic directors came and went their way, and the relationship between the company founder and funder, de Rothschild grew cooler and became problematic, as her interest in the company waned and all her resources were turned to her second company, Bat-Dor.

From a private company to a publicly funded one

When Martha Graham ceased to act as Batsheva's artistic director and her former dancers, such as Jane Dudley, who served as artistic director in the late 1960s, were not any longer at the helm, an acute leadership crisis occurred.

The list of artistic directors of the company is long: from the Canadian Brian MacDonald to the London based American William Louthier. After he left under a cloud, Linda Hodes and Kaj Lothman (who had been the company's ballet teachers) acted as joint temporary directors. The person who during those problematic years was the real captain of the company was Pinchas Postel, the general manager. He attempted to steer the ship in stormy waters, after most of the original dancers had left to pursue their own careers.

Though Moshe Efrati, Ehud Ben-David and Rina Schoenfeld were no longer dancing in productions, they contributed from time to time choreographic works. By some miraculous process, a young generation of remarkable dancers replaced the originals. Nurit Stern, Yair Vardi, Esther Nadler and several other talented artists continued the Batsheva tradition of charismatic, forceful and spirited performances.

Since the foundation of Bat-Dor, de Rothschild became less and less involved in the running of Batsheva. The crisis came to a head in 1974, when she announced that she was going to merge her two companies. A decision which in fact meant the end of Batsheva. The Baroness was astonished by the public outcry and protests her decision caused, both in Israel and in the whole dance community in America and Europe.

In Israel, several of those who had worked with the company, such as the designer Danni Karavan and the composer Zvi Avni as well as some of the leading personalities of art, made attempts to persuade public foundations and the Ministry of Education and Culture to undertake the consolidation of the company, in order to provide public budgets for its independent functioning after de Rothschild curtailed her financial support of it.

A committee was appointed for formulating the new public status of Batsheva. Lea Porat, the Director of the National Council for the Arts, accepted its proposals and Batsheva became a publicly funded company. De Rothschild agreed to lease the company's premises, equipment and performing rights to the new management for a token price. The budget was minimal, but nevertheless made the continuation of the company's work feasible.

Just before the public status of the company was changed, two important artistic events occurred. During the 1971-2 season, the great South African choreographer, John Cranko arrived in Israel to create a new work for Batsheva. Cranko was at the peak of his career. He had transformed the Stuttgart Ballet, an undistinguished provincial German ensemble into one of Europe's leading ballet companies. Cranko, the son of a Jewish father, never denied his Jewish ancestry, but wasn't very interested in his Jewish heritage either.

Cranko came to the conclusion he would compose a ballet based on well known poems by many of the leading poets in Israel - without musical accompaniment, apart from some percussion instruments. The actress Hana Maron was to read aloud the texts on which the dances were based.

The veteran dancer Moshe Romano, who had become Batsheva's rehearsal director, took care of Cranko in Tel-Aviv and he thought the best drummer available would be a young musician, Ruth Ben-Zvi, popular as "Ruthi the Drummer" and he was looking for a way to introduce her to Cranko. By chance, when John and Moshe were driving in a taxi, the radio was on and there was a percussion piece for oriental drum playing.

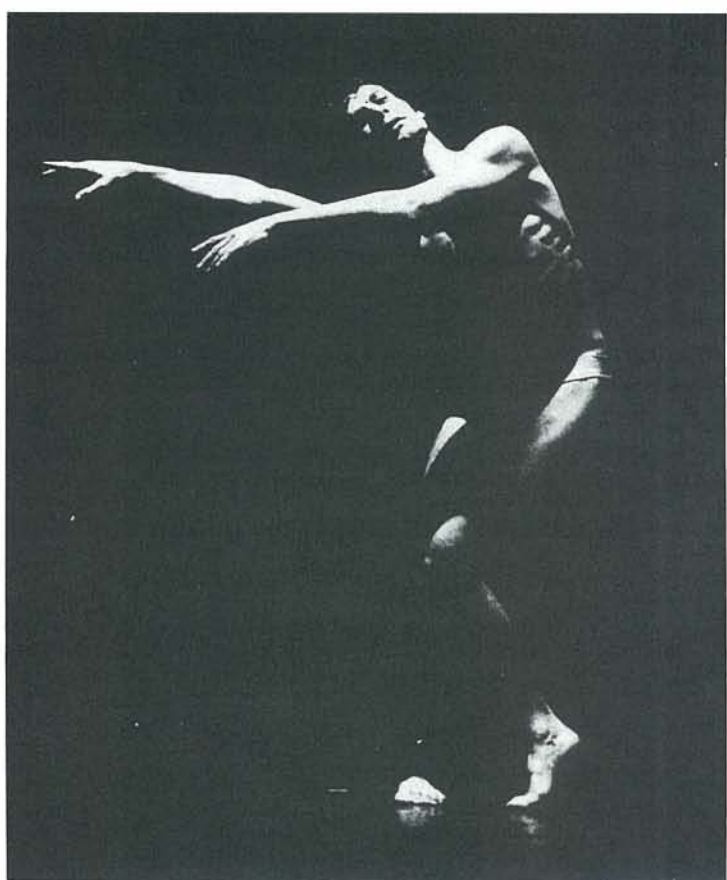
Cranko became excited by the rhythms, and as the drummer was Ruth Ben-Zvi, there was no further problem in their collaboration.

The work, entitled "Song of My People" was rather uneven - but with many unforgettable scenes. The opening sequence, for example, where the men enter into the text of the poem describing the poet's father being ordered by a Nazi concentration camp guard to undress, they take off their shirts and trousers and throw them away. Finally they lie in their white underwear in a heap of corpses as the lights fade. The remarkable dance of an "One Winged Angel", touchingly danced by Rina Schoenfeld was another original and moving climax of Cranko's work.

But without the knowledge of Hebrew, the language barrier made the appreciation of Cranko's very personal and innovative work difficult. The very tackling of Jewish or Israeli topics was a very rare occurrence in the company's repertory, in spite of the many biblical themes used by various choreographers, from Graham herself, through to Robert Cohan and several of the Batsheva dancers, who created new works for the company. It is a characteristic of Batsheva, that very few Israeli choreographers were invited to work with it, apart from present or past company members, all through its thirty years. Until the arrival of Ohad Naharin, it was only Mirale Sharon who repeatedly created for the company.

Martha Graham had never - apart from cooperating once with, of all people, Gerge Balanchine - created a company, not of her own. Therefore, the announcement that she would come to Tel Aviv to choreograph on the Batsheva dancers was sensational. Everyone knew of her obligation to de Rothschild. But she had often said that that account was already settled, and in any case, it was the years in which de Rothschild became less and less involved with Batsheva.

The personal as well as artistic situation of Martha Graham in 1972-3 was a dire one. She had just been discharged from a sanatorium after a treatment for alcoholism. She had no company of her own and her finances were in disarray. Everybody believed that at the age of 70 plus, she was, for all practical purposes, at the end of her tether. When Linda Hodes returned from a visit to New York and told Pinchas Postel, the general manager of Batsheva the sad news about Martha,



"POEM", CHOREOGRAPHY: ANNA SOKOLOV, DANCER: EHUD BEN-DAVID

he immediately responded by suggesting that they should invite Graham to come and work with Batsheva. In Linda's eyes this was a strange notion, but she phoned New York, and encouraged by Ron Protas, Graham's protector and factotum, Martha accepted the proposal.

The biblical legends of Israel's patriarchs were an obvious choice of topic and Graham decided to collaborate again with two Israeli artists, with whom she had worked before, the composer Mordecai Seter and the designer Danni Karavan. Several of the veteran dancers who had not danced for Batsheva for several seasons, such as Schoenfeld, Gluck and Ben-David, agreed to perform again for her sake. The result was mixed; on one hand a brilliant sculpted stage set, on the other, an uneven symbolic biblical pretext without too much depth and with energetic but rather shallow dancing. Altogether "Jacob's Dream" had the haphazard look of a sketch. A few years later, Graham reworked it with her own company and renamed it "Dream".

By one of those co-accidents that the muse of history is so fond of, Graham met the man who is now the artistic head and leading spirit of Batsheva, Ohad Naharin, as she was watching company classes while casting her new work. As she was not aware that Ohad was a green rookie, who had just finished his stint of army service and had hardly any dance techniques at all. But his striking figure and stage personality made her give him one of the leading roles in "Dream" - much to the chagrin of his colleagues, who thought he was too young and inexperienced to tackle a major role.

Ohad expressed his wish to go to New York to study dance. With the help of Graham he obtained a scholarship which made his plans possible.

Years of wandering in the wilderness

During the 1970s and 1980s, one could hardly find any direction or artistic policy in the activities of Batsheva. Artistic directors came and went. Though several important choreographers worked with the company, among them Anna Sokolow, Christopher Bruce, Donald Mckyle and the American-Israeli Gene Hill-Sagan, there was no clear artistic policy in the company's repertory. The nadir came when Paul

Sanasardo was appointed artistic director and for two seasons, until he resigned, succeeded in turning the company into a tool for performing only his own work.

When Robert Kohan became artistic adviser he suggested putting Moshe Romano, who worked with him for many years in London, in charge of Batsheva. But Romano, one of the founders and Israeli born, was unable to find a common language with the dancers, and soon left the post. David Dvir and Shelly Sheer, both excellent dancers in the company, occupied the position of artistic director, taking good care of the dancers, but without implementing any

Ohad Naharin's works, however, brought with them not only excitement and originality, but also a certain topicality, so palpably missing from the mostly reheated menu Batsheva offered its public

innovative ideas. It has to be pointed out, though, that during their tenure, up and coming choreographers of the young generation, such as Mark Morris, Doug Varone and Daniel Ezralow were invited to work for Batsheva and thus a refreshing breeze of contemporary dance began to be felt on the stage.

In retrospect, the most significant occurrence of that period was the annual return of Ohad Naharin, since 1981 (then a fledgling choreographer of great flair) to work with the company. An association which culminated ten years later in his appointment as artistic director in 1991-2.

The foundation of Batsheva in the mid-1960s co-coincided with what was later to be termed "the dance revolution". The works of Graham and Graham-related choreographers brought the young Israeli company to the cutting edge of modern dance as it finally became the accepted mode of expression. The later, post-modern, a rather 'lean' style of American dance, left hardly any traces in Batsheva's repertory. Indeed, there was very little post-modern influence to be seen in modern dance in Israel in general. From 1975 until the end of the 1980s, Batsheva was trailing, style-wise, behind the new wave of innovative choreographers. Though, sometimes doing good work, for example its version of Kurt Jooss' "The Green Table" or Cohan's "Cell", but presenting nothing experimental or thought provoking. Most of the time keeping in the safe middle ground of accepted public taste. This was at least partially the result of the policy of the then general manager of Batsheva, Bill Strum, a businessman, not keen on avant-garde experimentation.

While in Europe the new dance-theatre of Pina Bausch and her contemporaries was being forged, there was no trace of these new directions in the Batsheva repertory.

Ohad Naharin's works, however, brought with them not only excitement and originality, but also a certain topicality, so palpably missing from the mostly reheated menu Batsheva offered its public. His "Beynayim" (a.k.a "Passages") to Klezmer music by Giora Feidman dealt obliquely with the Jewish predicament. This was expressed by creating a group movement seemingly progressing in one direction only, a historical pageant of unrealistic but telling detail, ending quite daringly with a few seconds of a Hora.

In 1983, when the country was in the turmoil over the traumatic Lebanon War, Ohad came and choreographed his "Innostress", a very

personal evocation of those troubled times, precise but never descending into plain political comment.

$10 + 15 + 5 = 30$

In general, the 30 years of Batsheva's activities may be divided into three main periods. The first decade under the influence of Martha Graham and her school, the time of company growth lead by the charismatic artists of the first generation. Then, when the departure of Linda Hodes caused Batsheva to lose the performing rights of the Graham canon which served as its foundation and drifted without a clear destination or direction for nearly 15 years. Finally, the period of Ohad Naharin and other young choreographers, culminating in Ohad's pop-rock works, such as "Kyr", "Opening Ceremony" or "Anaphasa" - which again brought the company to the forefront of new dance on the world scale. As at the beginning, some of the leading innovative choreographers, such as William Forsythe, Jiri Kylian, Elisabeth Streb or Angelin Preljokaj collaborated with Batsheva.

Naharin's style is rooted in the Israeli ambience, with one not being able to pinpoint exactly what makes his work so Israeli, which, nevertheless, it undoubtedly is. What nowadays is so typical of the Batsheva dancers is that sometimes a dangerous ferocity of movements, total dedication to the magic moment on stage, a sense of humor and irony is present - an ingredient sorely missing from most contemporary dance - and a penchant for ugly costumes and seemingly discarded clothing retrieved from dustbins. No radiant 'beautiful bodies', like Graham's "Acrobats of God", but real people of all kinds, often with 'convict style' shaven heads.

This change in aesthetic direction brought with it radical changes in the company's artists. Many of the veteran dancers were unwilling or unable to adjust to the new regime, and left.

In the Naharin era, the role music plays in the choreography has become much more central. It is hardly ever just an acoustic accompaniment to the movement. Often there are live musicians on stage and the dancers are used as singers. Even more remarkable is the use of counter-tenor male voice of a dancer, which has become a feature of Ohad's work.

The costumes often are uni-sex, with everybody dressed in a skirt, which connects them to the style Mark Morris is fond of.

During the first period of Naharin's activity as director, he was accused of turning the company into a dedication to his own works only. Just as Jiri Kylian was accused of turning the Nederlands Dans Theatre into a Kylian company. In both these cases, strictures proved short sighted; and in due course both choreographers made their style the house style without restricting the repertory to their own creations.

After 30 years Batsheva is once again one of the leading companies in the world. It is very popular at home, especially with young audiences. It has a home grown style of Israeli providence, features it lacked for many years. The attitude of government funding agencies has also changed for the better since a progressive, peace oriented, government came into power. Batsheva's 30th birthday is not only an occasion for nostalgic reminiscing and historical accounting, but a moment for taking stock and simultaneously looking confidently into the future.

