



Dance Journey program, photo: Udi Hilman

Ga'aton. The dancers have returned to their housing, and safe rooms have been built. However, their daily work routines are constantly interrupted by rocket fire from Hezbollah and they are forced to stop whatever they are doing and find refuge in a bomb shelter.

Rami is dealing with many creative thoughts which he has to process before they can become a creative reality. He would like to do a new creation about our existence in Israel from a universal perspective, expressing internal tensions and the tensions from neighboring countries and the rest of the world. He believes that the expression of humanity by artists can possibly and very gradually influence the world. He hopes that change will come about by compromise, non-violence and a peaceful

coexistence.

Lynore Blum is a dance educator. She studied and danced professionally in South Africa. Managed her own dance school in Rishon LeZion and taught at the Bat Dor School of dance. Directed the school of dance at the Tzahala Community Centre. Was a dance examiner for the A.I.D.T Organization and managed its Israeli Branch for 25 years in addition to training teachers. Organized intercultural dance exchange programs and performances for young Israeli and South African dancers. Currently advising on the improvement of dance technique through the dancer's understanding of anatomy.

During my interview, Yoni said that “the Dance Journey program and the Summer Intensive are the best ambassadors for Israel due to Israeli culture and comradery, together with working in the serenity of the kibbutz where dance and creativity are the key objectives. There is no hierarchy with the dancers on the program and the dancers of the company. They enjoy the feeling of togetherness even though their studies are extremely rigorous. Dancers have said that the Dance Journey program was a life changing experience for them.” Danielle also stated that “Rami is very spiritual and believes in being human and creating a feeling of togetherness and respect both in and outside the studios. The dance world can be very cruel and brutal. The special experience of working with Rami is the acceptance of everyone and the feeling of being part of a family.”

When the war started, much thought was given to the complications of continuing the program. It was decided to close the program and restart afresh in the new academic year with added enrichments. The new 4 months long program called “International Dance Pro” will provide dancers with courses in music, music editing, stage lighting, and writing of resumes, just to name a few. This is in addition to improving technique, learning repertoire, and creative studies. The aim of the new program, under the guidance of Rami Be’er, is to bridge the gap for young dancers aiming for the international dance world, and this new and revised course will educate and equip them with all the necessary tools needed for their profession.

Fortunately, after a few months, safer facilities were found for KCDC1 and KCDC2 on Kibbutz Mizra, which is situated closer to the center of the country, near a town called Afula. At this stage, a few of the foreign dancers returned to Israel, some of the dancers from the young company were moved up to the main company, dancers that had been called to reserve duty returned, and auditions were held for male dancers. This enabled the main company to reach their full quota of dancers and together with finding substitute premises, enabled the company to start performing again.

The question of “when can we go back home to Ga’aton?” arose because the dancers’ rooming facilities on Mizra are very cramped and they don’t have the same personal or work conditions as in Ga’aton. Yet

the dancers have managed to work together and find emotional support from each other. Orine, who has been with the main company for 3 years, mentioned that the new and current members of the company are a good combination of people and that they are able to talk and work through their difficulties. For Dvir, who has been with the company for 7 years, things changed. For the first two and a half months of the war, the company was not able to work. Dvir felt lost without a routine or structure. He said that it was like living in a vacuum.

During the interviews, the dancers discussed how much they miss their privacy and living conditions in Ga’aton. “We often go back to Ga’aton to reminisce. We miss the smell of our familiar surroundings and we long for the stability of our previous lives.” They receive tremendous understanding and support from Rami. “He encourages us to be creative and to spend as much time as possible in the studios.” Dvir’s words of advice to other dancers in a similar situation is “to trust your environment, trust your skills, keep your motivation alive, and understand your limits.” Orine’s advice is “to use all your frustrations and to dig deep into your inner sole in a very creative way in order to physically express your feelings and to connect body and soul in order to heal.”

There were tremendous financial concerns regarding funding, so Rami and the financial director arranged a meeting with the Minister of culture, Micky Zohar. They felt that the minister understood their exceptional circumstances and that financial aid would be on its way. Meetings regarding the building of bomb shelters and safe rooms for the dancers in Ga’aton have been scheduled. One of Rami’s main concerns is the building of a safer environment for the international dance village which meets all their needs and in which the dancers can feel safe and secure.

Due to the huge Anti-Israel atmosphere in Europe and across the globe, all KCDC international tours have been cancelled. Because of the revival of deep-rooted anti semitism, there are now very serious security concerns for the company as well as for all Jews in general. Terrorism knows no boundaries especially when it comes to the State of Israel and the Jewish people.

Towards the completion of writing this article, I learnt that have returned to their dance village at Kibbutz

The morale and emotional state of the dancers had to be dealt with. Some had lost friends or family during the war and many tears were shed. It was a very sensitive and challenging situation for her and for the faculty members in encouraging the dancers to carry on with their regular routine. The dancers put together a 15 minutes long score, which they specially improvised to mark the 100th day of Israeli hostages in captivity. They presented this score in Tel Aviv at Rabin Square, Hostage Square and Habima Square. This activity received amazing public response and kept the dancers connected to the reality of being in the midst of a war. The dancers performed on many occasions for the evacuees staying in different hotels, as well as for the nine nursery schools who are a part of the enormous Magid Community Centre. The Sadna also participated in events held by the Municipality of Tel Aviv in honor of Women's Day. Einav is planning to start the new season in their temporary facilities in Tel Aviv, with a view to moving back to Ga'aton as early as possible during the new academic year.

The "Dance Journey" program has been operating since 2009. I interviewed both Danielle Ohn, the program's professional director, and Yoni Avital, who oversees

and manages the company's international marketing operations as well as the "Dance Journey" study program and the Kibbutz Summer Intensive. They operate under the umbrella of "The Masa Organization," that offers international and diverse study programs in Israel for the nurturing of young aspiring Jewish adults from all over the globe, providing many opportunities in many professions. The "Dance Journey" program has become a brand name and attracts dancers from many prestigious international dance institutions. As Yoni Avital said, "the program grew organically through word of mouth." "Dance Journey" is a very intensive and unique program where dancers study and live side by side with the dancers of the company, and enjoy the experience of working in a professional atmosphere for five months. Apart from gaining experience for their futures in the dance world, they also have the opportunity of experiencing authentic kibbutz life in Israel and building everlasting relationships with Israeli dancers. The program acts as a springboard towards the young dancers' professional career. There was another study program at the dance village for local dancers directed by Danielle and called "Dance Pro," which, after the Covid epidemic, was combined with the international program.



KCDC2, photo: Udi Hilman



Kibbutz Contemporary Dance Company, *The Director's Cut* by Rami Be'er, photo: Eyal Hirsh

international acclaim, and he has been commissioned to produce works for many companies abroad (Gratz Opera Ballet in Austria, Hungarian National Ballet, New Danish Ballet, Ballet Basel in Switzerland, and the Batsheva Dance Company in Israel, to name a few). Rami has been the recipient of many awards, both internationally and locally. In addition to his choreographic abilities, Rami also designs his own lighting and sets and often costumes for his creations.

Interviewing Rami and some of his dancers revealed how much inner strength and survival skills they possess. All programs were halted. This included the main company, foreign dance program, the Ga'aton Sadna program and the dance school. On a normal day, around 200 dancers used to attend different dance activities on the Kibbutz. For the first 2 months of the war, the young company KCDC2, comprising of 12 Israeli dancers, were moved to facilities in Tel Aviv and thus were able to carry on working and performing all over the country, as well as for families that had been evacuated from their homes, in

both the Southern and Northern parts of the country. Their performances at that stage involved audience participation and were designed to cater to the emotional needs of the people closely affected by the trauma of their situation.

Through the quick reaction to the situation by the director of the Sadna program, Einav Levi, and with the assistance of Efrat Yaron (the dance director of the Magid Community Centre in Tel Aviv), alternative plans were made for the program to be moved to the Magid Community Centre. They have been operating from there ever since. At the start of the war, Einav was in constant contact with the dancers and faculty members and managed to reorganize the program in spite of the complicated logistics she was faced with. Moving to Tel Aviv meant that the dancers had to make their own housing arrangements. Einav put her personal life on hold in order to keep the Sadna program alive, even though she herself had many personal issues to consider, including helping her parents who were evacuated from Kibbutz Nirim on the Gazan border.

When Will We Be Able to Go Home?

The Kibbutz Contemporary Dance Company at War

Lynore Blum

When will we be able to go home? This is a question that dancers of the Kibbutz Contemporary Dance Company ask their artistic director, Rami Be'er, on a daily basis. Many articles have been written about how dance has been affected in Israel since the 7th of October 2023, however nothing has been written about the dire situation of KCDC. The fear of the unknown and what the future holds for Israeli society is greatly felt by all its citizens, including all members and staff of the company and dance village. During the many discussions that Rami had with his team regarding their volatile situation, it was clear that they were the only prestigious internationally recognized company in Israel that could not operate under their normal conditions.

The KCDC was founded on Kibbutz Ga'aton in 1970 by the late Yehudit Arnon, a holocaust survivor, whose vision and determination resulted in the establishment and paved the way for the foundation of the company. This flourishing and vibrant international dance village is situated in the Western Galilee region in the North of Israel, near the Lebanon border. The kibbutz houses the main KCDC1 company and the second company KCDC2; a five-month long professional international program referred to as the "Dance Journey"; a student program for dancers over the age of eighteen called "Sadna Ga'aton" (Ga'aton Workshop); and a 2-6 weeks long summer intensive program for professional dancers and students, ranging in age from 13 to 30 years. In addition, the dance village has a regional dance school for young aspiring dancers.

Unfortunately, life in this tranquil, pastoral and productive dance village took a drastic turn after the October 7th massacres which took place in the South of Israel. Soon after the massacre, the terror group Hezbollah, backed by Iran, started firing rockets into the Northern regions of the country. Residents of the area had to be evacuated from towns, kibbutzim and settlements that were in the firing range of the rockets. They were moved to safer other areas of the country. This added to the enormous numbers of already displaced Israeli families from the South.

It was evident that the dance village in Ga'aton would be evacuated, and foreign dancers would leave Israel and return to their homelands. The main company is comprised of 18 dancers of which 12 are foreign. The facilities of the dance village were also needed to house soldiers of the Israeli Defense Force. Another reason for the evacuation of the dance village was the fact that there were no bomb shelters or safe rooms available on the kibbutz for the protection of all the dancers when Hezbollah rockets came raining down over the Northern areas of Israel. This was devastating to the company and all the other dance projects operating from Kibbutz Ga'aton. There was a feeling of doom and gloom with their survival at stake.

Rami Be'er, the company's artistic director, the son of holocaust survivors, who were founding members of Kibbutz Ga'aton, grew up on the kibbutz. His parents were musicians, and Rami learned to play the cello and studied dance with Yehudit Arnon on the kibbutz. He joined the company as a dancer in 1980, and became artistic director in 1996. His work has achieved