



Dance Spreads Its Wings: Israeli Concert Dance, 1920–2010

by Ruth Eshel. 2022. Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter. 531 pp., 151 photos. \$99.99 cloth, PDF, and epub. ISBN 978-3-11-074987-8; doi: 10.1515/9783110749878 doi:10.1017/S0149767722000341

International dance audiences are familiar with Israel's Batsheva Dance Company, Kibbutz Contemporary Dance Company, or movement practice Gaga, but have less knowledge of local Israeli dance histories. *Dance Spreads Its Wings: Israeli Concert Dance, 1920–2010* by Ruth Eshel (De Gruyter, 2022) offers a historically significant compendium of concert dance in Israel by expanding the written history of Israeli concert dance to include figures who are lesser known outside Israel alongside prominent ones. This 500-page tome is the English translation, revision, and expansion of Eshel's 2016 two-volume Hebrew-language set, *Makhol Poresh Cenafaim: Yitzirah Israelit L'Bamah 1920–2000* (Dance Spreads Its Wings: Israeli Creation for the Stage 1920–2000). Over forty chapters divided into ten sections, Eshel recounts in painstaking detail a century of Israeli concert dance. She argues that concert dance created Israeli culture over the past hundred years and identifies six waves of historical shifts that map compositional, aesthetic, social-political, and economic-model changes in Israeli concert dance. By highlighting the transnational influences that built Israeli concert dance in addition to local influences from Israel/Palestine—mostly from Germany, Austria, Russia, the United States, Great Britain, and South Africa, but also practices and individual artists from Holland, Sweden, Czechoslovakia, Yemen, Canada, France, Spain, Morocco, Japan, and Ethiopia—Eshel demonstrates the symbiotic relationship between Israel and the Jewish Diaspora. Eshel's experiences in the Israeli dance landscape since the 1960s—as dancer, independent choreographer, dance critic and historian, and artistic director of the University of Haifa's Eskesta Dance Theater for Ethiopian Jewish students—drive her take on these histories. By reinforcing common Israeli concert dance historical narratives, moreover, the book confirms canonical patterns on which

students and scholars may build or from which to depart.

English-language dance scholarship over the past fifteen years has outlined inquiry in Israeli concert dance (including the work of Judith Brin Ingber, Deborah Friedes Galili, Naomi Jackson, Einav Katan-Schmidt, Melissa Melpignano, Hodel Ophir, Meghan Quinlan, Henia Rottenberg, Nina Spiegel, and my own, among others), but what sets Eshel's book apart is its encyclopedic angle. Eshel relies on Hebrew-language primary sources (clippings, reviews, and countless interviews between the 1990s and 2010s with dancers) which provide a sense for local values within their time. The book's 150-plus photographs support this expansion, particularly for dances that have not widely circulated. Many captions identify every dancer, which fosters visual literacy of the work and writes these individual dancers into history. Eshel builds on secondary material by Israeli scholars who write primarily in Hebrew; Eshel's translation similarly gives their work new circulation through English-language dance studies outlets.

Eshel deepens narratives relating to the well-known Baruch Agadati, Margalit, Shoshana, and Yehudit Ornstein, Rina Nikova's Yemenite Biblical Ballet, Gertrud Kraus, Yardena Cohen, Baroness Bethsabée de Rothschild, Jerome Robbins, Anna Sokolow, and Inbal Dance Theater in the early and mid-twentieth century. She fills in critical details, such as a list of Kraus's students in 1955 (59), Rothschild's dance training with Martha Graham as part of her immigration history that fueled her support of Graham in Israel with the Batsheva and Bat-Dor Companies (59–62), a lived experience of Kraus's studio teaching based on Eshel's auto-ethnographic encounter at the Rubin (now Jerusalem) Academy of Music and Dance in 1960 (63), Rena Gluck's history (69–71), Talley Beatty's *Fire on the Mountains* for Israel Ballet Theater (55–57, 66), the intricacies of Sara Levi-Tanai's *Inbalit* technique (91–92), progenitors of Israeli ballet (101–126), Batsheva's early choreographic repertory by Oshra Elkayam, Moshe Efrati, and Uzi Sharon (139–146), and Gene Hill-Sagan's work for Bat-Dor Dance Company (160–2). Eshel expands English-language scholarship on Israeli dance with

explanations of dance's entrance into the university system (179–182), Efrati's work with Deaf dancers in Kol Demema Dance Company (194–198), Rena Schenfeld Dance Theater (261–265), Yaron Margolin's Multicultural Dance Company that brought together children from Ethiopian, Palestinian, and Russian refugee communities (269), and Zvi Gotheiner's start with Tamar – Ramla Dance Theater (271–78). Eshel's explanation of the development of dance curation in Israel through festivals and international competitions, the Dance Library of Israel, Israeli-dance-focused books and periodicals, Israel's National Digital Collection Project, and also her discussions of independent choreographers, including Nir Ben-Gal and Liat Dror, Inbal Pinto and Avshalom Pollak, Tamar Borer, Yasmeen Godder, Renana Raz, and Barak Marshall, in addition to the more well-known Ohad Naharin and Noa Wertheim, are significant contributions that expand defined narratives for Israeli contemporary dance.

Israel's cultural conflicts, dominated by Israel's occupation of Palestine, live in concert dance choreographies. At times, Eshel's localized focus for the early and mid-twentieth century on dances that sought peace or addressed the relationships between Jewish Israelis and Palestinians reinforces the histories of Israel and Palestine as adjacent instead of entwined. Yet, Eshel's increase in addressing the occupation over the course of the book reflects Israeli choreographers' escalated critique of it. With political shifts beginning in the late 1980s of the First Intifada, the failed Oslo Accords, the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, the Second Intifada, and the current dystopian moment, Eshel traces changes in Jewish Israeli choreography that mourned the peace process and challenged Israel's occupation of the West Bank (412–413; 485–490). Eshel further addresses binary political tensions within Israel's Jewish communities of Ashkenazi/Mizrahi, high art/folklore, modern-contemporary/ethnic, secular/religious, and center/periphery that manifest on stage and in presentation models.

Eshel advances a significant discussion about what is referred to in Israel as the center and the periphery. This distinction is between the center, which is Tel Aviv's secular, Western-facing urban environment where the art scene flourished since the 1920s, and two parts of the periphery in rural areas: 1)

kibbutzim (agricultural collectives) that upheld socialist Zionism and fostered Ashkenazi (European Jewish) values, German expressive dance and notation lineages, and Israeli folk dance; and 2) development towns, under-resourced areas expanded from transit camps where the Israeli government settled Mizrahi (Arab Jewish) immigrants in the decades after 1948, and Ethiopian Jewish refugees in the 1980s–1990s, communities doubly separated from the Israeli mainstream for being non-Ashkenazi and religious. Implicit in this center/periphery distinction is aesthetic, geographic, and socioeconomic Othering of Mizrahi and Ethiopian Jewish populations and practices as pejoratively ethnic from Ashkenazi-driven secular high art, urban culture, and socioeconomic status. By focusing her analysis of the periphery on kibbutzim, instead of on development towns, Eshel expands narratives of dance companies' development in the specific de-centered cultural conditions and demands of the kibbutzim, but since kibbutzim were ideologically central to Hebrew and Israeli nationalism, Eshel misses an opportunity to join dancers marginalized in development towns to this history.

There are some analyses that Eshel can push further. For example, in the 1920s and 1930s, many Jewish dancers in Mandate Palestine studied German expressive dance, either because they brought it with them when they emigrated from Germany or Austria, or because they traveled to Europe to study with progenitors including Mary Wigman, Gret Palucca, and Rudolph Laban. The anti-hierarchical values of German expressive dance, particularly movement choirs, supported socialist Zionism. Images in the book of Jewish dancers in Mandate Palestine between the 1920s and 1940s evidence corporeal participation in German expressive dance through movement choirs featuring kinetic combinations of groundedness and torsos carving through space. Because many German dancers and theorists participated in National Socialism (see Kant [1996] 2003; Manning [1993] 2006; Elswit 2014), *Ausdruckstanz/Neue Tanz* is seeped through with Nazi histories. This residue is fraught: Jewish dancers in Mandate Palestine participated in European arts discourses by practicing German expressive dance, and then after the Holocaust, German expressive dance fell out of favor in Israel. While I was not surprised that Eshel explained how Laban's movement choirs

inspired Jewish choreographers' festival pageants in Mandate Palestine in the 1920s and 1930s (27–29, 39), because so many Jewish choreographers were influenced by German body culture, I desired a more critical engagement with the implications of understanding this corporeality, especially because Eshel discusses the Holocaust and the turning-inward of Jewish dance in Mandate Palestine during World War II (36–45). Another conversation that deserves more space is about Palestinian and non-Jewish Arab dancers (324–332). The majority of the Arab dancers Eshel discusses are based in Israel, not the West Bank or Gaza; readers would benefit from contextualization of the social conditions for Christian and Muslim Arab choreographers who are citizens of Israel. Lastly, Eshel effectively addresses queer presences in Israeli dance from the 1990s to the present. Her study would be well-served by a companion conversation about queerness, however closeted, among the dance figures she discusses in the early and mid-twentieth century.

Dance Spreads Its Wings significantly documents established and emerging histories of Israeli concert dance from a local perspective. Its compendium focus expands the scope of established narratives available in English and brings lesser-known dancers into the discourse. The book provides important reference material for students and researchers seeking to understand the scope of Israeli concert dance history and scholarship. Within field-level approaches to localize dance studies, having Eshel's work translated into English importantly enables conversations about Israeli concert dance in both local and global contexts.

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DANCING WITH THE REVOLUTION: POWER, POLITICS, AND PRIVILEGE IN CUBA

By Elizabeth B. Schwall. 2021. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. 320pp., 21 halftones. \$34.95 paper. ISBN: 978-1-4696-6297-8. \$95.00 hardcover. ISBN: 978-1-4696-6296-1. \$27.99 e-book. ISBN: 978-1-4696-6298-5.
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In 1959 following his rise to power Fidel Castro stated, "Here the only thing everyone is going to have to dance with, whether they want to or not, is with the Revolution." Castro was responding to the anti-black reactions of white middle-class Cubans who feared how the desegregation process initiated by the Revolution would upend their intimate social lives. They were especially disquieted by the idea of their unwed daughters sharing a dance floor with black Cuban men, now granted open access to their previously segregated clubs. His statement intended to, on the one hand, assuage those anxieties, and on the other hand, boldly assert the necessity of political unity behind the Revolutionary project across racial lines of difference. Elizabeth B. Schwall chooses this famous quote as the epigraph to her book's introduction, rightfully positioning the resiliency and creativity of Cuban dance makers within this broader historical context of unexpected alliances, spirited vision, and forced compromises. Dance metaphors in Revolutionary political discourse evoke how different stakeholders in Cuban society nimbly navigated the spaces between official government platforms and their own aspirations. With graceful and captivating prose, Schwall brings into sharp relief the way the state mandate to "dance [...] with the revolution" cues us to how race, gender, sexuality, class, and ideology are intimately intertwined and were constantly being negotiated on and off-stage, and under high political stakes.

Dancing With the Revolution: Power, Politics and Privilege in Cuba is a groundbreaking history of Cuban concert dance makers' negotiations under different political administrations from 1930 to 1990. Schwall shows how this artistic population developed partnerships with government officials before the 1959 Revolution that laid the groundwork for turning the island into a world-renowned dance center.