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Ideas & People

BY YEHUDA LEV

A hometown Israeli dance troupe is an unlikely vehicle for social change • 'Bar mitzvah' preparation enters the computer age • ARZA has found the right man for a delicate job • The tables are turned as an enterprising 10-year-old poses a few questions

Israeli Dancing

You never really know where social change will occur these days. The women who dance in the Keshet Chaim Dance Ensemble here in Los Angeles informed its director recently that they were tired of playing second fiddle to the men dancers in the troupe's Chassidic Dance. Here of course they were running afoul of Orthodox custom, which keeps men and women separate on such social occasions and which, the women said, gives them the worst of the bargain, terpsichorically speaking.

Nothing daunted, the troupe's founder and choreographer, Eytan Avisar, prepared a new routine in which custom and women's equality exist side by side. In the middle of the Chassidic dance, he inserted a "dream sequence" in which the women imagine they are Russian men dancing in competition with the Chassidic men. And so peace and quiet descended once more upon the amateur dancers whose ensemble has developed, almost unnoticed by its hometown, into one of the finest amateur Israeli dance troupes in the country.

We met last week with Genie Benson who, in addition to doing a great Russian dance, handles publicity for Keshet Chaim ("Rainbow of Life") and she told us that the troupe has been dancing together since 1983, has performed to great acclaim at the Carmiel Dance Festival in Israel, at the opening of the 1984 Olympics, has appeared each year on the L'Chaim Telethon and in other celebrations, and is now preparing to go on stage at the Gindi Auditorium. That occasion will be for Israel's Independence Day and Keshet Chaim headlines a show which includes Hedva, Cindy Paley and Koleet, David Perkins who plays klezmer music, and Hillel the clown and mime. This summer the troupe will return to Israel for a second appearance at Carmiel and a tour of the country.

We asked Mrs. Benson if the ensemble is amateur by choice or by necessity. Mostly, she said, it's the latter. After deducting expenses for costumes, equipment and other essentials, there is little left to divide among 16 or more dancers, so all of them work (she is a dental technician) and dance purely for the fun and experience. The youngest of the dancers is 18, the oldest in the mid-40's.

Eytan Avisar is a former kibbutznik and a graduate of the Academy of Dance in Beer Sheva. In his dances, he utilizes modern music in ways novel to Israeli dance: Jazz and ballet are incorporated when they are appropriate, and Arabic music and dance are also used. He choreographs traditional and modern dances in new and challenging ways and one of his most important contributions to Israeli dance has been to free it from much of the traditional manner in which it has been presented.

You can see it all for yourself on Apr. 29 and 30. Call the University of Judaism (213) 476-9777 for reservations.



Members of the Keshet Chaim dance troupe

Israel Independence Day

ISRAELI DANCE AND MUSIC FESTIVAL:

The Keshet Chaim Dance Ensemble, choreographed by Aytan Avisar, expresses the old and new spirit of Israeli folk dance in honor of Yom Haatzmaut. Sun., Apr. 29, 2:30 and 7:30 p.m., and Mon., Apr. 30, 7:30 p.m. (Partially funded by the City of Los Angeles, Cultural Affairs Dept.) The UJ, Gindi Auditorium, 15600 Mulholland Dr. Fee. (213) 476-9777. . . . All-day workshop with the Keshet Chaim Dance Ensemble including dance, lunch, and matinee performance. 9:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m. Fee. (213) 476-9777, ext. 246.

April 20, 1990

April 13, 1990