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ze'eva!
a close-up

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"When I'm there on stage, I'm not doing steps. I'm absolutely doing a celebration. Every minute for me is full of joy."

November, 1975. Ze'eva steps down from the train. Her face in profile is an anachronism against the dark metal capsule. I have seen that same sharp silhouette before, but belonging to the sun and sand of another place, a wall painting of a dynastic princess in the ancient Middle East. The image bursts into rays of light and warmth, encompassing me in enthusiastic greeting. Ze'eva has arrived in Boston.

It is some months earlier, July, 1975. Ze'eva is seated on the grass in Radcliffe Yard. She has taken time from her schedule of teaching, rehearsing, choreographing at Harvard Summer Dance Center to give a "press conference" to the student writers on dance. Words spill out in response to the tentative questions. Her thoughts are clear, articulate, illuminating herself as an artist at work in full power of concentration. Yet there is no pretension. Ze'eva is accessible off stage and on, her personality as multi-faceted as the variety of characters portrayed in her solo repertory.

Ze'eva with Keren, her eighteen-month-old daughter. Ze'eva and Peter Ludwig, her American-born musician husband. Family ties, a New York home to return to after a day at class, rehearsal, teaching at Princeton, a week on tour. In her words: "the daily nourishment of my commitment to people directly around me, like a beautiful husband and a beautiful child is very important. For me it is like the cold days when you have an oven at home that keeps going the whole winter—that for me is the oven, the warm oven from which I go and to which I return. It gives me more fuel. It's important for me and important for me to remember to keep it intact."

Ze'eva alone on stage. A thin beacon of flame, even in repose as she readies herself for the first section of her work, "Three Landscapes." She is dressed in a simple golden-orange, long flowing robe. As she begins to dance, the movements from a core deep within her radiate out through long arms to her fingertips, from her dark deep-set eyes, thrust-out chin, elbows and flexed foot to draw us nearly out of our seats onto the stage.

There is no pegging her movement. Hers is not Graham's technique, not ballet's, not ethnic's à la Inbal. She is Ze'eva Cohen, a unique modern dancer who belongs to the stratum of artists denying comparison.

Ze'eva: "I feel that in my style of movement, nobody can pin down, though I've studied with everybody that everybody else studied with, I don't fall under any category. It seems I have a movement style that nobody can say whom I am like. I am like myself. How did I evolve that kind of style? I'm not talking about being described as an actress-dancer. I'm talking about the movement per se. The movements seem to be unique, and I cannot say where I studied them. It has evolved out of my own heritage. I feel movement in ways that if I reduce it back to folklore, Yemenite people move in the same way. So I think I am open and aware, that my dance started from my folklore. I think it's so important! These days I feel like telling all people I teach: Go back to your roots. How did your people dance? How did they feel their connection to their place, to their earth at that time? Otherwise dance can look so esoteric that it gets sickening. I look at a person and it looks like no heart, no breath, no roots, no earth underneath them. Dance must have roots because it's always started from a spiritual physicality. For me dance was always the celebration of life. Life doesn't necessarily mean 'fun, ha, ha!' It's also *oy vey*!"

From the beginning, Ze'eva's life combined *oy vey* with the fun. Ze'eva Cohen was born in pre-partition Palestine before Israel was formally declared a state in 1948. Both her parents were active members of the Irgun, the underground movement working for the establishment of the Jewish state. Her father was arrested as a political prisoner by the British and incarcerated in Africa for five years when Ze'eva was a child. Her mother worked as a nurse to support them.

Ze'eva: "When you are born to a certain environment as chaotic as it is you never realize it, because that's all you know. You think that's what life is all about. It's only when you grow up and things change, when you move to another environment, that you realize, gee, it was rough, wasn't it? But as a child you learn to live with it. Tel Aviv at the time was a desert town. It was all dunes and dunes of sand, and buildings here and there, with one little miserable city square that was called *the* square. When I look at it today, it's one of the most miserable squares I've ever seen! Not many people lived in Tel Aviv. Everybody

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At left:
Ze'eva Cohen in a studio portrait.
At right:
A moment of suspension from Escape, *an excerpt from Anna Sokolow's* Rooms.

knew everybody, you didn't lock your doors. Nearly everyone was a refugee from one country or another. It was just past World War II. My house was an eight-family house, two apartments on each floor. Every apartment had refugees from another country. When my mother was not around, I would stay with the neighbors from Hungary one day, the neighbors from Germany another day and then with the neighbors from Poland. There were people from all over the world. All languages were spoken, all cultures shared.

"At times of curfews I remember British soldiers taking my mother out to do the rounds. I would see the evil guys taking her in her nurse's uniform and I never trusted them to bring her back. So I would say that my childhood in that way was lonely, not being able to go outside and play because there were curfews, a lot of barbed wire that I remember, a lot of things like putting us in big empty lots to count us like we were cattle. But my own house, it was a family house. There was always a family to take me in when there was nobody to take care of me. Therefore, dance for me at that time was a beautiful place to kindle my emotions, an outlet.

"All the kids in the neighborhood, as small and primitive as Tel Aviv was, had their dancing and piano lessons. Our parents, poor as they were, wanted to make sure we were nice and cultured when we grew up. Luckily, in my neighborhood was a lady from Vienna, Gertrud Kraus, formerly a well-known choreographer-dancer in Europe, a contemporary of Jooss and Wigman. She and her assistant used to teach us small children. They gave us some basic exercises, stretching exercises on the floor. And afterwards we did improvisation—we did improvisation forever. Both of them played the piano. They played while they taught. I remember loving it—absolutely loving it! Whenever I heard music I used to agonize if I did not move to it. It's funny because I had the desire—the urge to move for me was absolutely a response to almost a painful kind of sensation. Whenever I heard music I would melt. The only way to survive listening to music because it was so beautiful and overpowering for me was to dance. In a way, dancing with Gertrud Kraus was like the best therapy! No one thought about technique, ever! But it was good—you were expressing your soul.

"I studied with her until I was sixteen. And, of course, it got to be a little more sophisticated as we grew up. There were a few more technical demands on us, but I didn't get a sense of solid technique. Her forte was exposing us to all possible inspirations in the arts. She herself was a musician, an artist, a dancer and a sportswoman. So she would bring one time as a source of inspiration a musical score she was crazy about. It could be Stravinsky or Bach. She would play from the score, talk about it, analyze it and then we would dance. She never choreographed for us; we would choreograph in collaboration. She would suggest, she would read to us, or she might bring in a picture and we would talk about forms in space. We talked about conceptual ideas, about shapes in space and energies, maybe from the Laban tradition which analyzed them so carefully. But it always had to be spiritual.

"Whenever a foreign company came to Israel, it was a big national event. It wasn't like New York, where so much is happening that you don't bother to go and see it. Whenever any dance company would come, like Pearl Primus or Antonio, everybody would go and see it. After the company left, we would try to simulate that company's style and spirit for the next few months; it kept us going. We would become Spanish dancers and then we would become black dancers. What I'm saying is that I was exposed—maybe that's one of the reasons I am so open and I can do so much repertory. I can be so many characters. People cannot believe how I change myself on stage from one character and feeling to another so fast. The main point of view when I was young was to see how many ways I can stretch myself internally, not the steps, but the mental, physical, spiritual attitude. I would identify with people that way.

"When I was sixteen the word came around, the latest thing from the United States came to Israel in the person of Rena Gluck. She came from the Graham school, but she married an Israeli violinist and came to settle in Tel Aviv. She was a fine teacher for Graham technique. That was the latest and the word went around, 'If you are to become a professional dancer, you'd better pick up the latest technique in modern dance; enough of this kiddie stuff.' Though everybody still admired Gertrud Kraus. Today she is the first artist of dance in Israel and received the Prize of Israel.

"I went to Rena Gluck and studied with her. Though the exercises intrigued me, soon I found out it was going to be the same exercises every time and maybe one additional one if we were good. And over and over again, four times a week. That was a new approach to me. Though it was challenging, it was very disheartening because I did not find the spirit of dance. Rena herself was wonderful because she brought from the United States the latest in education, to discuss problems with students. Since she encouraged us to talk to her, I would go to her and say, 'Do you really believe'—I was so dismayed!—'that you can train people to be dancers by doing that routine over and over every day?' The set of exercises repeating was a shock idea for me, but now I'm doing that every day in ballet class. At that time, however, it was a painful transition It was explained to me that, unless I learned to repeat the same exercises and better the anatomical understanding of my body, I would not go far because I would lack sound solid technique. Which was, of course, true. I could always get by because I am a strong performer, but without technique. So at sixteen I started picking up my technique. By eighteen or nineteen I started some jazz lessons, and sneaked now and then to take a ballet class, still a no-no in Israel if you were a modern dancer. Then came service in the army for two years, when I was eighteen to twenty years old. I started performing at sixteen as a professional dancer. I performed with Rena Gluck's company, then in a company called Stage for Dance in Tel Aviv. We toured in all the cities and kibbutzim. I remember performing jazz next to mooing cows and at the kibbutzim (now they have fancy theaters there) on tables pulled together in the dining hall. You tied them together, put masking tape between the tables and that was the stage. I remember lying on the so-called floor in a dramatic, beautiful solo by Anna Sokolow and always knowing what they had for dinner!

"Anna Sokolow first came to Israel to work with the Inbal company. We would sneak and take classes with her because she was a famous American choreographer and we always wanted to pick up what was happening outside. She was guest choreographer for our Stage for Dance—this is around 1958. I was in her piece. Later she started her own Lyric Theater in Israel. I was accepted at the audition and danced with her there for three years until I became a soloist. One day she said to me, 'How about going to the United States?' If not for her, I wouldn't be here. She gave me my airplane ticket. She arranged for my first $500 from the Israel-American Cultural Foundation. I was the first person to receive a dance scholarship. Before that they would only give money to painters and musicians. I came to Juilliard with a one-way ticket, $500, and nobody I knew but Anna in the United States. My parents could not help. I had a free room at International House, two-thirds of a scholarship at Juilliard and the rest I made up. At one time I had seven part-time jobs while studying and performing at Juilliard and performing with Anna. I did things like teach Hebrew, Israeli folk-dance, being a tour-guide at International House, working at the cafeteria, babysitting.

"I finished Juilliard in three years. I had learned the material for the first year in music and choreography with two girls who had graduated from Juilliard and taught in Israel. They taught so well that when I came and auditioned I passed my first year in those subjects. Since I was already a professional dancer, as miserable as my technique was, I was a performer and everybody knew it. I was in Anna's company from the minute I came. I couldn't do all the dances because of my schedule. I did the lead in *Dreams* and an important solo in *Rooms*."

Including the time in Israel, Ze'eva danced for eight years with Anna Sokolow's company. She left Sokolow when she felt the need to work with other people and to develop her capacity as a choreographer. She appeared with the American Dance Theater at Lincoln Center, Dance Theater Workshop and as guest artist with Pearl Lang and company. She choreographed, for many groups, including a production of *Mod Donna*, a play directed by Joseph Papp for the New York Public Theater. She began teaching at Princeton in 1969, when the university went coed.

"To be a freelance meant for me the freedom to work with many people, not just one. I preferred instability to a secure company position. To be in another company meant to put the lid on my creative growth, forever to be told what I'm doing, when I'm doing it, where I'm going. Having control over my personal life was also important for me, to be able to have a home, to know how much I wanted to travel and how much I do not. But the main reason was, I think, I was too much of an individual and I felt I had paid my dues in a company.

"I knew from the beginning that I was not going to make my money as a dancer. I made myself a promise, never to compromise my artistic and personal growth for a salary. Dance is the one place I am not going to compromise. I'd rather earn my money from teaching which, luckily, I enjoy, and make sure I am forever growing as a dancer. So I solved that problem and chucked it. I did not feel the need to join a company for the sake of financial security."

Ze'eva initiated her solo dance repertory in 1971. Since then she has performed all over the United States, as well as in London, Berne, Geneva, Bonn, Munich, Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. She remembers clearly her first steps establishing her project.

"After about three or four years of trying 500 things, dancing here and there, it dawned on me one day that I was being wasted, that my en-

ergies were not focused. I was not being used to the fullest of my artistic potential. I had to think, 'What am I doing?' One day I listened to my husband, who is a singer, jamming along with a pianist friend. The whole thing was probably brewing in my head. This one incident brought it up. I heard Peter singing along with the pianist. We have many musician friends from Juilliard. They were going through the song literature and I was listening and loving it, thinking about the luck and wealth of material available to musicians. There they were, going from Bach to Mozart, to Beethoven, Shubert, Brahms to Schumann. I thought, here I am, having spent all my life from age three in a dance studio. It was unlucky for me and for the field that we don't have repertory. Suddenly it clicked; that's what I wanted to do. I wanted to do my own work. I remembered seeing a few solos that I was crazy about and I thought, 'Why can't I help myself and find some repertory?' There is not a dance literature, but there are many choreographers who have done beautiful works and some solos. They are never being done. The works had been danced once in New York and that was it, finished. Here I am, an accomplished performer with great versatility. In the ballet world, the emphasis is on the performer. In modern dance, the emphasis is on the choreographer. I would try to bring to modern dance the emphasis on the performer who expresses the repertory of various choreographers, the literature of modern dance.

"The more I thought about it, the more excited I became. I had found a focus and an outlet. I could eventually commission people to do a piece for me. I would take notes on it, and film it. I would build my own library for solo works and take my own steps for preserving material. Another thought was that I had always felt unhappy that modern dance is not more popular. When I say popular, I mean that it doesn't reach more people. I think the only way to reach more people is to do the works over and over again. Being one person, I could tour. I could bring the latest work of contemporary, living choreographers to other parts of the country, to people who do not come to New York. It would be fairly inexpensive to produce. And I would have full artistic control and personal control at the same time. I began talking to people about

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At left:
Cohen soars in Frances Alenikoff's The One of No Way.
Below:
In Semitic costume, Cohen portrays Sarah in Women of Israel, *Margalit Oved's dance of the first four Hebrew mothers.*

giving me works, how to organize solo work so I could get grants, go on tour, and so forth.

"This was my coming out from youth to maturity, I think. Every person I spoke to helped me. I was amazed because until that time I had the youth psychology that you are alone against a hostile world. Work in Israel was closed to me at that time. My parents, society, teachers wanted me to do something else, not to be a dancer. I had the guts to call key people like Adam Pinsker of AADC, Jeff Duncan. Everyone I spoke to gave me sound advice and encouragement. I became incorporated, a tax-exempt organization. A lot of it was paper work, hustle, but I had help. A nice volunteer lawyer did the legal work for me, because, of course, I had no money.

"I produced my first dance concert at the Cubiculo Theater in New York at minimal expense. Everything was free except the brochure and mailing. The loss wasn't great, a few hundred dollars, but that was nothing for the investment. The Cubiculo held only seventy-five persons. I gave three concerts, so how many people did it take? Only 225. But the event was loaded, the vibes, the energy, the acceptance. I was lucky because reviewers came. The response was so enthusiastic and encouraging."

Ze'eva's first concert program at the Cubiculo included excerpts from *Resonances* by Jeff Duncan, *Harriet* by Peggy Cicierska, a work about a bored housewife with fantasies about being grand; Deborah Jowitt's *Green River Road* and *Contrast* by Gerda Zimmerman. After that concert, four new programs were presented.

The works from the first concert, except for *Contrast,* remain part of Ze'eva's current repertory. Other choreographers represented are Anna Sokolow (*Escape* from *Rooms*), Kei Takai (*Talking Desert Blues*), Frances Alenikoff (*The One of No Way*), Elizabeth Keen (*Tempo*), Rudy Perez (*Countdown*) and James Waring (*Thirty-two Variations in C Minor*). According to Ze'eva, the Waring piece is ". . .like magic, hard for me because it's the only one of my repertory that deals with balletic material and has stretched me that way." Ze'eva's works for herself include *Cloud Song* and *Three Landscapes*.

The most recent addition to the repertory is a work by Margalit Oved, funded by a grant from NEA. The work is entitled *Women of Israel* and is about the Old Testament figures Sarah, Rebecca, Leah and Rachel.

"I am excited about the latest piece I am doing, because it uses directly my personal heritage, my folklore, and the lore of my grandparents, who came to live in Israel from South Arabia. Margalit Oved, also an Israeli and who lives in the United States, was born and raised in Aden, South Arabia. She helped me get in touch with my ancestors because she lived with them, she was part of the community. It happened to be a singing, dancing community, also involved with crafts. I learned from her first-hand the song; the steps, of course, we elaborated. The work is about characters, about people. It's about the first four Hebrew mothers, the way they are recorded in the Bible. We see them as people. That's what I love about it—and not as some kind of saints, but in the good Jewish tradition, down-to-earth, real people.

"Sarah is a ninety-year-old lady. She barely moves, a lot of gestures, yet it's dead, not alive. Her dance deals mainly with her disbelief at being told that she is going to have an offspring, her first son, when she is ninety years old. She doesn't believe it. So, it's all the feeling of joy, unbelieving, with the fear, predicting that Isaac will be sacrificed, that it won't be so easy and smooth. It's a struggle with the unbelievable joy and fear and having a frank dialogue with God about it. Words are used on the tape. On the second piece, which is Rebecca, I see her as a thirteen- or fourteen-year-old, boisterous, wild little social chick, clever, sexy, playful. She is so much fun to do. We call it theYemenite rock and roll. It's an absolute contrast to Sarah by way of speed, vitality. I feel like I'm shedding a few skins of age when I'm doing Rebecca.

"Then I get into Leah. I have not performed this because it's not ready yet. I have to do a lot of rehearsal. Leah is older than Rebecca. She is not as beautiful and she knows it. She is jealous of Isaac going to Rebecca. She has guilt because she knows her father will cheat and put her in place of Rebecca at the wedding. She knows how ugly it is, the competition between two sisters. Her refuge, her defense mechanism turns her into a brat kind of girl. I have to be exactly as I was told not to be. I have to be rude—I'm using words, screaming, shouting. I don't know how I'm going to do it, but I have to face the fact that I do want to speak and shout and talk in Arabic, which I don't understand, and do a lot of obscene gestures. I have to be real dirt.

"Rachel is the classical mystery of the whole thing, the sorrow, the hope. She is the only one of the characters who is dealt with as an abstract, an archetype rather than a particular person. She is the only one covered from head to toe so that you hardly see her face."

After *Women of Israel,* Ze'eva's next piece for her solo repertory will be a work of her own, funded by an NEA choreographer's grant. The work will call for a dancer, a singer (her husband Peter), and two musicians.

Ze'eva created a work for the Choreographers' Series of the Boston Ballet entitled *Goat Dance* (premiere, February 4, 1976). Her feelings towards ballet dancers is contradictory as she explained:

"My ballet teacher, Richard Gibson, of the Joffrey school is very rare. He is a fantastic creature for me because my basic belief in movement is realized, my feeling of the way movement should be produced, through breath organically from the center. He applies the same principle of what starts movement from the center of the body. Breathing begins in a deep source, in the abdomen, from which energy is generated out. This is really Isadora, finding a source within. I think Richard Gibson is the only ballet teacher I've ever had who fully understands where movement starts, whether you are in ballet or modern dance. For me, this is an ideal. I strive for it as a dancer and choreographer. I believe there is one source in each person's body where everything meets, where your basic energy starts, whether it's biological, psychological, mental or physical. It does coordinate with breathing. So the breathing and energy are where it starts and spreads out, as Richard says, like a sun sending sunbeams all over your body, out into space, into the universe. It's the way you do half-plié in the morning. It's not just bending those knees and how high I can kick my leg. Instead, it's can you be in touch with that deep source of positive energy in your body. So every movement you do is a celebration of life, good or bad. When I'm there on stage, I'm not doing steps. I'm absolutely doing a celebration. Every minute for me is full of joy.

"Ballet dancers have so much of being part of big establishments. They have to do so much to please audiences. I'm talking about two things. One is the quality of dancers, both ballet and modern, do they understand what I just said? It used to be that way but it went out of the window with the Merce Cunningham followers. I'm not saying that about Merce Cunningham, because when he's on stage he is still the best, but the Cunningham followers. They were important to extend the choreographic possibilities but it was an areligious generation. One of my students said I was the most religious atheist he'd ever met!

"So I'm frightened of ballet dancers and their technique. When I look at them I don't see the reason to dance, not just to do the virtuoso turns. And I think that their choreography must please an audience. I cannot think in that term, as an audience-pleaser. I have to please what I want to do, regardless of whether or not the audience will like it. I am worried about my acceptance in the ballet world. I'm also awed by technicians. I was always a virtuoso performer but not a virtuoso technician. I want to work with ballet dancers, though, because it would be fun to bring the personal feeling I have to them."

Ze'eva's 1976 tour schedule includes performances in New York state, Ohio, New Orleans, Illinois, Wisconsin and a March concert in New York City. Her schedule of daily ballet classes, twice-weekly trips to teach at Princeton, rehearsal, tours, always returns full circle back to Keren and Peter.

Ze'eva right now: "I plan to keep the solo repertory program which is such a rewarding thing for me to do. I feel at my best doing that. Also, I love the residencies on campuses because I teach and can spread my philosophy in dance, the way one should move and the way one should feel. I feel that, as I grow older, I would like to concentrate more on choreography, but not to sacrifice performing. I feel that right now I am in my prime. I would like to continue my development as a choreographer in a slow way, perhaps one new piece a year for myself or for someone else. I am ready now to work with other people. I need it to go back to myself, to find out how I deal with choreographers, with dance material. It was encouraging, after being all over the place, to go into isolation and work by myself. Once a choreographer has given me a work, usually I never see them. Every once in a while they check it, but I have full artistic control. They trust me, all of them. Working by myself was good for three years. Now I feel the need to start sharing, to have other people in the room with me, to give and to get, to give and take vibes." □

Dance is often seen as an immediate art, one which is here for the moment and then gone. This is only in part true; there is also a great continuity in dance, a continuing of traditions, cultural and aesthetic. This is best exemplified, perhaps, by a teacher passing on skill and knowledge to the student. Such is the case with Gertrud Kraus and her pupil, Ze'eva Cohen, who, when she was just beginning to dance, studied with Kraus in Tel Aviv. Following is an article about Kraus which shows, in part, not only the rich cultural traditions which have given so much to the work of Kraus and Cohen, but also, the abiding teaching tradition which links generation to generation.