Tributes to Moshe

Bianca de Jong

I have attended Camp in the early ’80 (In 1982 and 1983 for sure). Being rather young of age it was a great adventure for me. This opportunity has contributed to who I am as a teacher now and I’m grateful to those who offered me the chance of having this experience. I took home two dances from Moshe and have danced them in my Dutch International Folk Dance Group for quite a few years: Yalil was created during Camp in 1982 and the year after I learned Ilu Tsiporim. recently one of the students of the Dutch world dance Teacher Training taught Yalel Hawa and watching this dance brought me back to 1982… Thanks Moshe for his efforts for Israeli and International Folk Dance. We’ll miss him and my heart goes out to all who love him.

Kalman & Judith Magyar

Judy and I are saddened by the news of Moshe's passing to the eternal folk-dancing community. To the two of us he was not only a good friend but a life changing person, who touched our lives very deeply. Of course many persons can and will write the same about Moshe, but in our case it may be a different story. Both Judy and I emigrated to the USA in early 1960’s from Budapest Hungary. It was a time, sometimes difficult for us to adjust to a new life in New York City. We found our community in the City and one significant part of it was a Hungarian folk dance group called HUNGARIA. Eventually, we became leaders of the Ensemble.

Moshe was building up his International Folkdance Camp, at that time in Connecticut. Someone told him about us, do not know who, but I can still remember clearly the evening – we were practicing in the Hungarian House, and a strange guy – with a bushy hair and big black mustache came in and quietly stood at the side and watched us. After we had a break he told us that maybe we should consider teaching also at IFC – to the recreational folk-dancers. Of course we knew about the international folk dance scene and about IFC, but never though of becoming teachers of the movement. Well, this invitation totally changed our thinking about our mission and offered us new avenues to share our wonderful Hungarian culture with others. We accepted his invitation and it lead us to learn more about our culture, to develop programs, travel wide, participate in wonderful experiences, produce records, and eventually start our Hungarian Symposium. It all started that evening when Moshe came to our rehearsal in the Hungarian House.

In view of the above, we need to say a few words about this man, Moshe, with the black hair and big mustache. He was a never tiring very warm and supportive person. He knew how to make people happy and enjoy a good time dancing, listening to music, sharing different cultures without favoring one over the other, respecting family and friends. Every evening with Moshe at the IFC or in a folk-dance event was always a rewarding and loving experience. We fondly remember Moshe and Ann and all the others who joined him in folk dancing and allowed us to appreciate their culture. At the same time it made it possible for us to bring our Hungarian music and dance closer to them and hopefully gain respect and appreciation of its beauty.

Alexandru David

I met Moshe Eskayo about 30 years ago when he invited me at least twice to teach in his camp. At the time many folkdancers were comming from Canada, Israel to learn new Israeli folk dances and were coming participants from other countries. I remember as teachers, Turcotte from Quebec, Moshiko from Israel, Mihai from California and some others. I remember his young wife with heavy New York accent, his doughter, one or two and I remember Moshe preparing for the teachers falafels, after the party. I was doing mostly of his dances. I renember vaguely one of his dances with a spice from Argentina. About few weeks ago, somebody posted in Face Book, one of his dances, fast and difficult and I hope to learn this time to spread it further to Romania and Moldova. He was a great choreographer and dancer and lots of us now realize his talent. I personally regret him very, very much and I consider this is a big loss for the international folk dance community. One more last but not least thing; Sorry, Steve, buddy, I will not regret you as much.

Steve Kotansky

The first time I came to Moshe's camp as a teacher it was with Tom Bozigian. Then I came another year (in Pauling) and I was there together with Ercument. Moshe and Susy were sitting together at one camp where I was teaching and said to Susy "You know, he's not bad". You didn't know how to take Moshe. He was always pulling your leg. I did the Shoemaker with him and Guy at one camp. Moshe brought in a lot of teachers for the IFC Reunion camps. In the long run, Moshe was a really good guy.

Tom Bozigian

In the early 70s, I was with Moshiko and Moshe in NYC; we went to Kenny Spear's session, and had so much comraderie. I also remember the kumsitz/campfire sing-along evenings at IFC, with Moshe playing accordian and me playing percussion. Fond memories.

Susan Wetter

Moshe was not an ordinary friend (or ordinary in any way). He was creative, hilarious and talented. Spending time with him was an adventure. One hot summer day we attended a friend’s funeral at a beautiful old church. As we entered they gave us a little candle pushed up the middle of a paper Dixie cup and lit it before we went to our seats. We had to stand, the service wasn’t in English, and was long. Suddenly I smelled something burning. I looked over and his cup had caught fire. I didn’t want to startle him so I calmly said in his ear, “Moshe, your cup is on fire”. In his true fashion, he was able to wake up, put it out, and continue as if nothing happened. Unfortunately, I was not so lucky. I found it hysterically funny and could barely compose myself. Not a good look at a somber funeral. Every time I thought of it brought another laughing attack with tears running down my face. Actually it still does.

Guy Haskell

I met Moshe for the first time when I was about twelve years old. I had recently started dancing at Maryanne and Michael Herman’s on 16th Street. I think the sessions started around 5:30? I would usually hang out in Central Park at the “Fountain” during the afternoon with the hippy types then take the Subway downtown. Soon there was a buzz about this place uptown, “Moshe’s.” Many of us, after Jovano Jovanke at Maryanne and Michael’s, started making the trek up to 2121 Broadway, often with a stop food on the way at Blimpie Base.

I had never met anyone like Moshe. Actually, I think it fair to say nobody has ever met anyone like Moshe. I had met few Israelis, but none who embodied so closely the macho Israeli vibe of the fifties and sixties. I had never met anyone so spontaneous, so unabashed, so self-assured. Living with my mother after my parents divorced, with a dad I loved but felt was too passive, too unassertive (all somewhat unfair characterizations in retrospect), I think Moshe was just what I needed to survive the not always nurturing force that was my mother. I may have taken the machismo and bravado a step too far at times, but I think that was the armor I needed to survive with young ego intact.

After Folk Dance House, Moshe’s was more intimate, more intense, more primal; a dream for a teenage boy trying to break away and fly free – hopefully to the accompaniment of lovely female companions. And OMG were there lovely females at the Israeli Folkdance Center. Not only that, the whole point of the place was to dance with them and be with them and connect with them and with the summer breeze blowing through the windows that opened onto 74th St. (and, of course, the men’s baths in the Ansonia Hotel), the fluorescent lights turned down, and the music . . .

So that was it. I was hooked.

Then I found about Sadot; rehearsals every Sunday, performances every few weeks. Moshe’s “techniques” class MWF, then Laura’s ballet class TTh. I lived most evenings on the IRT from 28th St to 72nd St, and at the studio.

And then came the dance weekends, then the camps, then a year in Israel, the studio in Greenwich Village, two more camps, then off to grad school in Indiana, and a hiatus of a few decades.

Moshe was a counterpoint to much of what I had been exposed to in my young life. And IFC and Sadot were my refuges from home life, but that’s another story.

And the years passed, and I lost touch with everybody from that world. Then, one day I was awakened from an afternoon snooze by the phone. You know how there are some voices that you recognize from one spoken word, no matter how long the absence? “Allo, Guy” That’s all it took. Imagine, after over thirty years you hear the voice of one of the most important people in your early life. I fell off the couch. “Moshe?” and he started talking about a reunion as if no time had passed at all. I don’t think he had any idea the emotional turmoil and happiness that resulted from that phone call. And the following days revealed one long lost soulmate after another; Danny, Susie, Debra, Tony, Susan. . . (there were a lot of Susans back then!). Seeing Moshe and all the others at camp, hearing that music, music and movement that was etched so deeply in me. my body moved to the dances autonomously, almost without my mind mediating between the music and movement. The entire weekend was like a dream.

I will always be grateful to Moshe for being, well, Moshe. Not only was Moshe an anchor in my youth, Moshe brought my life full circle by enabling the reestablishment of connections I had no idea were, actually, vital to my happiness, essential to my sense of self, and necessary for me to feel complete.

Susan Falcon-Hargraves

He was bigger than life and had a reckless sense of humor. I adored him. I was in Sadot when I was in high school, and much of my life at the time revolved around dance. Thirty five years (more or less) two marriages and several names and addresses later my phone rang. The voice said “Suzzy Siegel??? WHY you are in Arryzona??” Post 9/11 I had been terrified to fly. There was a dance weekend in the offing. I flew. Love you all, my fellow Sadotniks, living and passed. Love you Moshe.

Tony LaGreca

I remember IFC well! I had so much fun there that I forgot to find my bunk and wound up sleeping on the stage in the dance hall. I never did find my bunk.

Abby Saxon (formerly Abby Levine)

Moshe was quite influential for me as I went on to become a professional dancer, dancing most notably with Jazzdance, The Danny Buraczeski Dance Co, and later a College Dance Professor at both NYU and Vassar College (for 25 years at Vassar!)

I was between 14 and 17 years old when I would go downtown from Riverdale in the Bronx to dance at at Moshe’s on 74th St. and Broadway… both Saturday nights - and then on Sunday mornings (my dream at the time) to dance with Sadot! That was probably 1969 - 1972. I actually followed in my older sister’s footsteps going downtown to dance on Saturday nights - it was originally more her thing than mine, and I looked up to the guys and girls that went. But eventually I was completely in love and caught up in becoming a good dancer. I loved folk dance and the connection with Israel was special, as I didn’t have much Jewish background. The music and dancing gave me my first sense of nationalism - something I really didn’t know until then.

Once I got past Moshe’s funny male chauvinistic side, (which he definitely had in those days!), and realized that he was incredibly talented with music and folk dance choreography, I just wanted to dance for him. He was a task master, but always with that underlying sense of humor. I idolized some of the better dancers, and wanted to emulate them. Moshe gave me the chance and it was truly the beginning of my love for dance, and understanding how to pick up steps and combinations. I remember “getting” my first double pirouette (En Dedans) in a Sunday morning Sadot rehearsal as he beat his stick on the floor, and we girls came barreling across the floor on the diagonal in consecutive turns… LOL! The performances were exhilarating, and I always felt more honored to be a part of them than nervous - which of course I always was just a little.

There was an aura about Moshe’s studio that was serious and technical, in addition to the fun open dance sessions. It was inspiring and so were the dancers who went there. It will always be such an important part of my life, and when I hear a folk dance that I knew - my heart skips a beat - and I can probably still remember most of the steps. I have choreographed many concert pieces for the Vassar Repertory Dance Theatre and other companies in the Hudson Valley - and I know that Moshe’s use of music and dynamics indeed has had impact on my artistry. Moshe holds a very special place in my life and my art.

Randi Spiegel

I first met Moshe in the 1970s when I attended Kenny Spear's session. He scared me. He was gruff and didn't seem to smile very often. As the years went on and I started going to IFC weekends, I got to know him better and we got along. One morning, while waiting for the Express bus to Manhattan to go to work, a car pulled up. It was Moshe with Michal and a classmate in the back seat. Moshe had the carpool that day to bring them to school. He told me to get in, so I did, and he drove me to work. After that, there were many times where I'd be at the bus stop and he would pick me up. After a few years, I was helping him with Hora Shalom with his mailing list and typing and copying the syllabus (even my mother helped with the mailings). I attended many IFC weekends but in 1984 I went for the whole 9 days and then Hora Shalom 2 days after IFC ended. When I got married and moved to NJ, we'd speak often and he'd come out to dance at MFD on Wednesday nights every now and then. He would often say how he preferred running IFC than running Israeli camps, but of course he did both. He worked so hard to make sure people were having a good time at camp. He played and joked around – this certainly was not the Moshe I met in the 70s. I will always be grateful that I knew him during the best times of my life and I will miss him greatly.

Murray Spiegel

Moshe could be gruff. He could be an ass. He could act like a child (especially in restaurants). But he was one of the most remarkable people I ever met. Here's why.

- His longevity as a creative person.

Most choreographers make really good dances over the course of 10, maybe 15 years. Moshe had a span of 60 years. Dances like Liya, created in his 57th year of choreographies, are popular all around the world. That's remarkable.

- Moshe's pursuit of quality.

Moshe didn't produce a huge quantity of dances. The pressure was there; when the dance camps came around, everyone said What new dance do you have for us? Some years there weren't any, and the campers were upset. No matter. No wine before its time. The music and the dance had to fit well, or he wouldn't be happy. He knew that a dance that sticks around won't be flashy, set to the most recent music, as the latest hit, only to be discarded in 5 weeks. Israeli dancers are fickle. Moshe's dances were instant classics, because he had taste.

- Moshe was pioneering, #1.

Before anyone else, Moshe admitted to a love of Arabic music, and choreographed to it. He was chastized, ostracized by this choice. How can you create dances to the music of our sworn enemy? No matter. He was intrigued by the music, excited by the music, and found treasures there. Later on, Israeli choreographers started doing the same thing. It was acceptable. But Moshe was there first. Years earlier.

- Moshe was pioneering, #2.

Moshe's dances and the music have rhythms that are rooted in International dance. Moshe's ignoring of borders took his ear not just to Arab areas, but to Eastern Europe and beyond. Many of his dances have a Syrto rhythm, or a Balkan rhythm. The trickiness, the differentness was intriguing, interesting. It made his dances unique.

He was also unique in running dance camps for both the Israeli and International dance communities. The Israeli camps were Hora Shalom, Hora Keff and Sababa, and the International camps were simply called IFC. No other Israeli choreographer had his feet, so to speak, in both the International and Israeli worlds.

- Moshe wasn't egotistical about his art.

He often said, I'm NOT a choreographer. Perhaps he detested the pretentiousness of the term. Or maybe he felt what he did didn't rise to that level. He said, I'm only an arranger. An arranger of steps.

- Moshe created for himself.

Moshe didn't particularly care if his dance was well-liked. If a group of people didn't love a dance, he wouldn't take it personally. He had a stable view of himself. He only cared about pleasing a very specific audience - himself.

He crafted a dance so that it's interesting, intriguing, entertaining, and challenging, just for his own internal compass. By being "true to himself," he ended up with more authenticity.

- Moshe cared for the community.

Yes, his dances will obviously continue to live, just like we still do dances by Rivka Sturman, Yonatan Karmon, Shalom Herman and Yo'av Ashriel. But his cultivation of the dance community, both Israeli and International, via his sponsored workshops and dance camps - that's what was most valuable. We came back each year, to share dances, life, stories, meals and loves. Moshe hated that Israeli dancers began dancing alone, without holding hands.

The circle, the connection between all dancers, was more than just symbolism to Moshe. It represented everyone holding on, helping each other, being connected, being part of a whole. Moshe admired that International dance has retained that, long after Israeli dance stopped doing it.

- Moshe sacrificed.

Few people knew how much. He lost $10k at his first camp. But he kept doing it. He rented huge industrial gas-powered turbines with 4-foot-wide fans to heat the IFC dance hall during one exceptionally cold weekend. He sometimes brought in catered food when a venue couldn't serve kosher food. Moshe rented a bus to drive those who didn't have cars. Just a few examples that his commitment to the dance community was often at significant personal sacrifice - behind the scenes - that most people were unaware of.

He worked so hard, and sacrificed so much, to make sure people had fun at all your camps.

- Connections.

I met Randi at one of his workshops. I fell in love with Randi at one of his camps. He changed my life. I will miss Moshe, but I'm glad for what he gave me, and gave everyone in our community.

Joan Hantman

Shalosh!

Ah, Moshe, what do I say about you?

What do I say about a man who taught me the intricacies of Israeli dance? What do I say about the man who introduced me to the finest Israeli and International dance teachers the world has ever known?

Shalosh!

What can I say about a man who cared so much about each of his creations and who would grill me before each teaching of his dances to make sure that I got every single nuance correct?

Shalosh!

How can I describe my teacher, my mentor, my confidant, my close friend?

Shalosh!

How should I describe the man who taught me how to dig in up to my elbows to mix the salad and hummus?

Do I have to count heads again??

Shalosh!

How should I talk about the man I once feared as a strict dance teacher and the man who, despite knowing that I was not in the ideal relationship, still agreed to walk me down the aisle when my own father could not be there?

Shalosh!

What should I say about the man who changed my life in more ways than any other?

Shalosh!

Which words can describe the man who would remember to call on every birthday, and who would announce himself when I answered the call or picked up my messages with just a single word?

Shalosh!

How should I describe the man who was still able to recognize my voice when we spoke by phone only a few short months ago?

Shalosh!.....

I love you Moshe. I miss you Moshe. I will hold your memory in my heart forever and promise to honor and cherish your dances. Thank you doesn't even come close to the words I want to say. But you know that already. You know that there is only 1 word to convey my thoughts.

Shalosh!

Iffat Hussain

Oh no..!! And, so soon after Atanas.

It is indeed another huge loss.

But, what a wonderful life and what a beautiful legacy for all of us.

I feel fortunate to have had the opportunity to dance, chat, laugh and dine with these incredible masters. Rest In Peace! God Bless.

Lois Ross

I enjoyed dancing with Moshe Eskayo and although I am not able to dance right now due to balance problems I will cherish his memory.

Jim Gold

I remember Moshe so well. We loved doing Debka Oud, and more. And such a great influence on folk dancing, dance camps, and more! Beautiful quote, too by his daughters.

Michael Levinsky

Today I was relearning Hashir Sheli, which Moshe choreographed in 1971. I first met Moshe in 1980 at IFC. I fell in love with his dances and his fun spirit. As I write this with tears, all I can say is he will be so missed by so many.

A footnote .......I started videoing him at his camps in 1980, and when I teach his many dances, I am blessed to watch the young Moshe and Ann teach and dance! Moshe you will be missed.

Sarada George

So sorry to hear this. I remember dancing with Moshe during summers when I was in college and several of us from the Brandeis Israeli Dancers (who were all trained by Fred Berk) went to dance at Moshe Eskayo’s sessions in Manhattan. He always called us “those Brandeis kids” but he definitely thought we were good dancers and often made us demonstrate stuff. Our Rochester group just did Sapari on Tuesday evening, in memory of Moshe.

Lorraine Cohn

I knew of Moshe since 1965, when Sadot performed at the New York World's Fair, in the New York State pavilion. Ann was pregnant then with Irit. I decided at that time, that one day I would try out for that group. When I started attending his Saturday night dance sessions in 1968 or 1969, I met members of Hashomer Hatzair dance group, rehearsing with Moshe. So he choreographed for that group in the Israeli dance festival while Fred Berk was still the director.

Jacqui Horwitz & Phil Mason

We met Moshe at our first IFC a few years ago. I remember how funny it was when Moshe stood between Maurits and Cristian with shoes in each hand, trying to hit them as they tried to block him. I wish we could have spent more time with him, but we’re looking forward to learning more about his incredible life.

Mindy Jacobs

I went to Philadelphia to a dance session that Moshe was leading that evening. (Those days I was “mashuga” with the dancing, went all over). Moshe announced that he would give one of his Keff CD’s to anyone who could dance Debka Li’el without any mistakes. I rushed to the dance floor. He was watching me like a Hawk. He smiled as he handed me the CD. I thought to myself, “Wow, I received approval from the Master”. It’s Keff 2. That’s how long ago it was. I still have it as a special possession. May he RIP

Ellen Grumer

I used to take classes with Moshe. He could be a bit volatile. At one of his classes, I don’t remember where it was, but he had installed a new disco ball in the ceiling. At one point he was unhappy with how we were following his directions so he took off one of his sandals and threw it at us. Carole Frank picked it up and threw it back at him almost hitting his new disco ball. Needless to say it was the last time we had anything thrown at us. Despite this tantrum, his classes were always fun and interesting. He would have us try things out, which was always exciting. I also thought his choreographies were the best. They flowed smoothly from one step into the next. You never had the feeling that you wanted to go in another direction. I judge all other choreographies by his. I will miss him.

Robin Feiglin Brigaerts

I went to one of Moshe's weekends when I was in my twenties. Irit was there, just a little girl at the time. Moshe had hired a bus to pick up all of us non-drivers up from New York City and take us out to the country. I don't remember any of the dances we learned, but I do remember having a great time. At the end of the workshop, we had a two-hour exercise session that acquainted me with some muscles I didn't know I had. Afterward, I sometimes saw Moshe in the neighborhood (Inwood). He didn't recognize me and I was too shy to introduce myself to the master folk dance teacher.

Corinne Lyons

I gave a record to Moshe “Voice of the Turtle -a Singing Group in Boston that sang Sephardic songs. He loved it and told me he came from people who spoke Ladino. I was so happy he liked my gift.

Marcia Schran

At one of the first IFC revival camps, I saw the returning dancers from his original performing group, Sadot, having so much fun reconnecting – laughing and joking around. I went to Moshe and asked him if I could retroactively join the group. He replied "Send me an application." His humor was unique.

Chelley and Bob Gutin

We're formerly from Teaneck NJ and danced with Jim Gold (and Karl Finger in NYC) for years. Moshe came to Jim's group at Fairleigh Dickenson University one Friday night in the Spring of 1976 to invite dancers to a Memorial Day workshop in Pauling, NY. We had never heard of an IFD weekend!

We could barely hold our own during all the fabulous workshops and parties. In bed every night, our calf muscles twitched, but we managed to fall asleep. I'm not completely sure of all the IFD teachers because we ALSO went to a full WEEK workshop that August. I might be confusing those two events. I do recall classes by Mihai David, Tom Bozigian, David Vinski, and a Scottish dance teacher, in addition to Moshe's classes. Yves might have been there. One night all the teachers swapped outfits and did hilarious caricatures of each other. Moshe's workshops and the other sessions were terrific and probably equivalent to "Advanced Placement Courses" in accelerating our development - in what as turned out to be a major joy of the last 50ish years.

Felice Zimmern Stokes

I remember Moshe very well. I used to come to his dance classes a long while back. Even though he was a tough teacher, I felt that he was a very good one. I loved his choreographic dances - although they were a bit hard to figure them out. Personally, he had a good sense of humor and was very kind. There will never be another Moshe!

Michael Rosenbaum

In my late teens and early 20s Moshe believed in me and gave me the chance to expand my potential and become a semi-professional dancer is his group. I can’t tell you how much that did to my self-esteem at that time when life was a little tenuous and unpredictable. At that time in my life I was feeling kind of lost; this gave me a focus and positive feedback to believe in myself and be part of something productive. It is what I needed at the time and I have never forgotten it.  You could say Moshe really kindled into a strong flame my love of folk dancing which I still have to this day. In fact I met my wife several years later at folk dancing and one of the reasons she was attracted to me was because I was a good dancer and confident. Thank you Moshe. May you lift into the highest realms of light where you can dance all day long and never get tired.

Sharon Polsky

I remember him telling me once that he didn't jump when he danced, rather that the earth pushed him up - I always thought that was a brilliant observation from a brilliant choreographer and dancer. Dancing was his life and he made it ours as well. I will miss him.

Leslie Levy

Since his death, I've shared several stories about Moshe, but they were not stories of him. I had first heard of "Moshe...um, Something" in 1972 but I believe I first met him in October of 1994 (at Rita Gould's funeral on Long Island). Later he started dropping by at Long Island sessions where we often chatted. One night at the Y, I confessed to him my story of 1972 (when my roommate and I skipped our weekly session and missed meeting him, a spontaneous drop-in who taught Sapari) and how it was almost 30 years that I finally got to learn the dance.

During our many conversations (including several at Karmiel in 2016) it was apparent that I was seeing a man not at his peak, which is why I have no stories worthy of his memory.

I recently shared that my return to dancing, following my father's death, was at Ruth's Riverdale party for Moshe on the eve of his return to Israel. He had a table there full of his old records and other musical recordings, all free for the taking. I was impressed by the broad range of his interest and gratefully selected a few items of Israeli, Kurdish, Arabic and Brazilian music. I was not alone in this, and I am certain that everyone who chose "Moshe souvenirs" treasures them as I do mine.