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The Dancing History Collection: Cultural Dances, Part 1. Chapter 1: Four Israeli Folk Dances

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**1**

**FOUR ISRAELI FOLK DANCES**

Jill Beck and Ayalah Goren-Kadman

**1.1 EXCERPTED SUMMARY**

Compared with the dance traditions of many other countries, Israeli folk dances are very young indeed. With a history of approximately 55 years, they are the result of a conscious effort to create an indigenous Israeli dance tradition.

Israeli folk dances do not usually tell a story or depict specific events or characters. Most of them simply communicate the joy of life and the pleasure of dancing together with other people. Although there are also slow, romantic dances, energetic dances dominate.

Israeli folk dances can be classified into four main styles depending upon the major influence on the dance: the Hassidic-influenced; the Yemenite-influenced; the Arab-influenced; and the Israeli-style dances that draw from global sources and from new choreographic inspiration. Other dance forms have also served as source material: Eastern European (Slavic); Balkan; Mediterranean; and contemporary popular dances. Ayalah Goren-Kadman stresses that an Israeli dance in a particular style and the original dance that influenced it are two quite different works. Israeli folk dance choreographers have used selected movements of the original dances as material from which to create their own dances.

To this day, folk dances continue to be a very important part of the Israeli culture and are popular among all ages.

**1.2 MATERIALS**

Audio CD  
Soft shoes

**1.3 OBJECTIVES**

1. To understand that a folk dance tradition can evolve naturally or be intentionally created
2. To learn how choreographers can borrow material from traditional dances and re-arrange, manipulate and modify components to create new dances
3. To explore four different styles of Israeli dances and the influences that shaped them
4. To analyze defining characteristics of Israeli dances from four diverse examples

## 1.4 RECONSTRUCTION STRATEGIES

1. The steps and rhythms of the four Israeli dances in this chapter are fairly easy to learn. What may be more difficult, although essential, is to capture the spirit of each dance.
2. Listen to the music for each dance before learning any movement. Articulate the qualities of the music, and explore the full range of emotional reactions that the music provokes. Since Israeli dances are choreographed consistently to existing songs and melodies, from which the dances take their titles, aspects of the character of each dance can be discovered in its music.
3. After learning the movements of each dance, allow the body to respond naturally by adding individual nuances and details. For example, in the *Hora Khedera*, the elbows and upper arms can bounce ever so slightly during the Hassidic Shuffle, and the shoulders and head can react to the celebratory finger snaps. These details are the personal responses to, and investments in the dances that need to be elicited by informed coaching. They have not been notated because they spring from spirited performance rather than from a desire to achieve a visual result.
4. Abandonment to the pleasures of group dancing can be a valuable lesson in the achievement of personal performance versatility, and in submerging self-consciousness.

## 1.5 ASSESSMENT

Students can be assessed on the basis of:

1. Their sensitive performance of the dances, capturing the movement idiosyncracies, musicality, and expressivity of each
2. Their ability to articulate overriding characteristics of Israeli folk dance
3. Their ability to understand that some dances are designed for the pleasure of the participants, and that this genre of dance is as important as dances designed for the pleasure of an audience



**Illustration 1**  
**MAP OF ISRAEL**

Showing its neighboring countries and its position on the Mediterranean Sea

## 1.6 ISRAELI FOLK DANCES

Compared with the dance traditions of many other countries, Israeli folk dances are very young. With a history of approximately 55 years, they are the result of a conscious effort to create a unique Israeli dance tradition.

It is unusual for a people to deliberately set out to create a dance tradition. More commonly, tradition evolves slowly over the centuries from a variety of sources and from the input of countless individuals and groups. However, as regards Israeli folk dance, the precise years and authoring voices of its traditions can be specified.

Israeli folk dances represent unique examples of cultural expressions whose evolution was greatly accelerated, resulting in the realization of a comprehensive folk dance tradition in less than twenty years. The process began when a group of dance pioneers assembled in 1944 and agreed that the new country needed to have its own national dances that would affirm the contributions to the Israeli national identity of its pluralistic sub-groups. Now, 55 years later, Israel boasts a repertory of more than 2000 dances, and new ones are created regularly in the various styles that characterize the country's diverse population groups. One leading founder of the folk dance movement in Israel was Gurit Kadman, mother of Ayalah Goren-Kadman.



**Illustration 2**

Ayalah Goren-Kadman, one of Israel's foremost folk dance leaders, choreographers, and researchers.  
Photo courtesy of Ayalah Goren-Kadman

With the establishment of the Jewish state in 1948, Jews from all over the world began resettling in Israel, bringing with them dances from the different countries in which they had lived. These dances were many and varied, but none were purely Jewish dances.

However, there are ample references in the Torah (the Five books of Moses, the Prophets, and Later Writings making up the Hebrew Bible) and the Talmud (The Oral Tradition of Jewish history and belief) of vivid dancing by the Jewish people in ancient times.<sup>1</sup> Many dance movements are named in the texts, but since there are no descriptions of the dances, nobody knows the details of how they were executed. Nor is there any significant evidentiary base of statues, reliefs or engravings depicting dancers, in accordance with the Commandment "Thou shalt not make any likeness nor graven image." Thus the ancient dances cannot be revived from texts or works of art. Only the vital spirit of the history of dancing by the Jews can be recalled.

When the Jewish population in the year 70 A.D. was forced from its land and dispersed over the world, it clung stubbornly to its spiritual heritage, but could not always preserve a living tradition of its folk arts, especially songs and dances. Jews in the Diaspora were influenced by the countries to which they emigrated, and over time they lost their songs and dances as they adopted those of their host countries. Since no written or graphic descriptions existed and the tradition in most cases ceased to be passed on orally from one generation to the next, the history of ancient Jewish dances was disrupted, and the dances largely disappeared.

As the Israeli folk dance pioneers began their research about creating an Israeli dance tradition, they discovered that despite social upheaval, two Jewish communities had nevertheless developed and preserved a rich dance culture of their own. These groups were the Hassidim and the Yemenites. Briefly, The Hassidim represent a movement of Judaism that originated in Poland in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Religious enthusiasm, close-knit group cohesion, and charismatic leadership are the distinguishing marks of the Hassidim. Hassidim emphasize emotional expression through their devotion and they not only observe Judaism, they celebrate it in every facet of life, in their heart and in their deeds. The Yemenites are people from Yemen, a country in the Arabian Peninsula in the Middle East. Since the destruction of the Second Temple in the year 70, Jews played a prominent role in Yemen's economy and politics. With the advent of Islam in the eighth century, Yemenite Jews were relegated to the lowest rung of the social ladder. During Operation Magic Carpet (June 1949-August 1950) nearly 50,000 Yemenites were airlifted to Israel by the Israeli government.

Both communities had lived fairly isolated from the rest of the population in their host countries, and had thus succeeded in keeping their own traditions alive. The Hassidic and Yemenite styles of dancing became building blocks for many Israeli dances.

Besides the Yemenite and Hasidic dances, Israeli folk dance adapted rhythms and movement vocabulary from many of the non-Jewish dances that the pioneers had learned while in the Diaspora. Among these dances were the Hora from Rumania, Polka and Krakoviak from Poland, and Cherkessia and Kossatshok from Russia, to name only a few. For decades, the Rumanian hora has been the dance most identified in the popular imagination with Israeli dancing. Its principal features-- the closed circle that defines its



space, its simple movements that enable everyone to participate, its egalitarian roles and linked arms--have been powerful symbols of Israeli social and political ideologies.



**Illustration 3**

Dancers performing a hora.

Photo courtesy of Ayalah Goren-Kadman

Arabic dances have also exerted a strong influence on the content of Israeli national dances. The Arabic dance debka, a foot-stomping dance originally performed by a row of men, has been adopted and used as a basis for creative development by many Israeli folk dance choreographers.

Over the years, all of these contributing dances, with their diverse cultural roots, have undergone a process of "Israelization" to the point where the original dances are often no longer recognizable. They have indeed become newly defined, genuinely Israeli folk dances.

Do these dances share any common elements? Israeli folk dances are so varied that it is difficult to classify typical features. Gurit Kadman, Israeli dance pioneer, named vitality, sweeping buoyancy, verve and variety of steps as characteristics of Israeli folk dances. She also pointed out that the sheer number of complicated forms and movements indicates the somewhat artificial birth and the modern origin of the dances. "There is a lack of simplicity and naiveté in the specially composed dances that express Israeli pride and nationalism."<sup>2</sup> Israeli folk dances can seem highly designed. With their balanced arrangements of deliberately eclectic movement vocabulary, they remain faithful to the kaleidoscopic fragmentation of the Diaspora, rather than seeking single, unified images.

Israeli folk dances do not usually tell a story or depict specific events or characters. Most of them simply communicate the joy of life and the pleasure of dancing together with other people. Although there are also slow, romantic dances, energetic dances dominate. The most common dance formation is a circle, but there are also line and couple dances. Square dances are uncommon.

Dances are usually named according to the melodies and words of the songs that accompany them. The dances are thus connected with specific songs, but their movements generally relate to the melody only, not to the contents of the lyrics.

The four dances presented in this chapter each represent a different style. Israeli folk dances can be classified into four main styles depending upon the major influence on the dance: the Hassidic-influenced; the Yemenite-influenced; the Arab-influenced; and the Israeli-style dances that draw from global sources and from new choreographic inspiration. Ayalah Goren-Kadman stresses that an Israeli dance in a particular style and the original dance that influenced it are two quite different works. Israeli folk dance choreographers have used the movements of the original dances as material from which to create their own dances. For example, one striking difference between the Israeli and the source dances is that in Yemenite, Hassidic or Arab cultures men and women do not dance together, while in the new Israeli dances they do. Another difference is that Israeli dances are choreographed and learned; there is a set order of parts. Yemenite, Hassidic and Arabic dances have a looser structure. The order of parts is usually dictated by the leader of the dance or by the musician.

Folk dances continue to be a very important part of the Israeli culture. They are popular among all ages. Although there is often dancing at social gatherings, the dancing can frequently be an event in itself. On any given night, Israelis have a choice among many schools and community centers, where for a small fee they can dance all night. Dancing is even a part of the school day; in many schools there is a half-hour "dance recess" once a day.



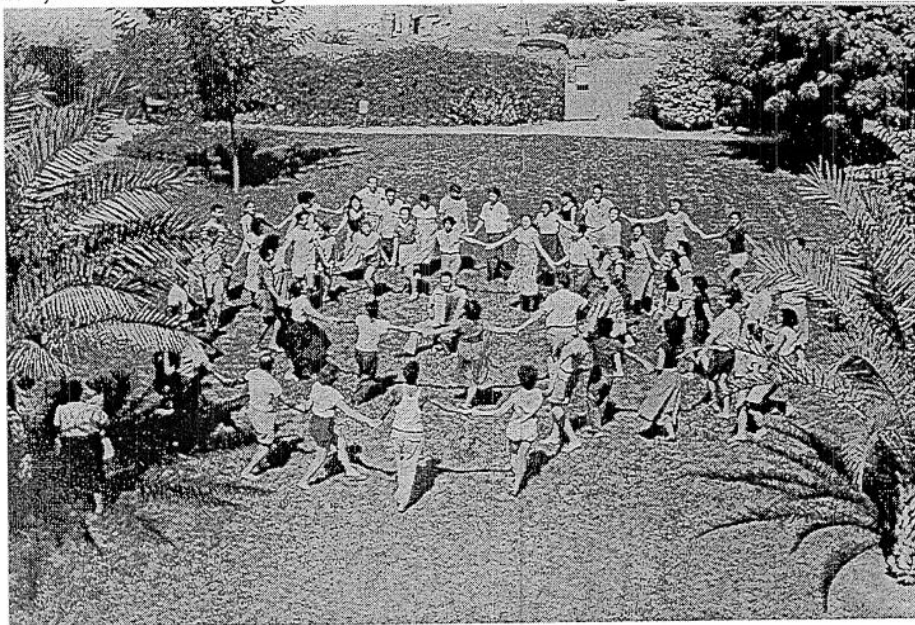


**Illustration 4**

Folk Dancing continues to be a very important part of the Israeli culture.  
Photo courtesy of Ayalah Goren-Kadman

## 1.7 MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

In the past, the most popular instrument to accompany folk dancing was the accordion. Illustration 5 shows an accordionist seated in the center of a group of dancers, who form concentric circles around him. However, in recent years the prevalence of the accordion has declined, and often dancing is done to audio recordings.



**Illustration 5**

Accordionist sits in the middle of a group of dancers.  
Photo courtesy of Ayalah Goren-Kadman

Various orchestrations are used in recorded dance music, ranging from small to quite large ensembles. Dancing may be accompanied by singing as well, although the words of the songs are often extraneous to the movement design. The audio CD selections for this chapter use clarinet instrumentation to simulate a klezmer sound, which would be a typical accompaniment for Hassidic-style dances.

## 1.8 COSTUME

In Israeli folk dancing, participants wear regular Western-style clothing resembling that found in America and many parts of the world. Israel does not have a national costume.

For performances, choreographers and ensemble directors may design special costumes according to their ideas about what Israeli society does--or should--represent. As a result, there is tremendous variety in presentational dance costuming.



**Illustration 6**

“People wear regular clothes for folk dancing.”  
Photo courtesy of Ayalah Goren-Kadman

## 1.9 TERMINOLOGY

The following terms, applicable to the four Israeli dances in this chapter, are pronounced in the Audio CD.

*Simkhu Na*. Terms for this dance are in CD Selection 1.

Rikud Ma'agal Vezugot: circle and couples dance

Tza'adat Khiluf: Pas de basque

Kfifat Berekh: Knee bend

Haramat Berekh: Lift the knee

Ha'avarat Mishkal: Shift weight

Tza'ad: Step

Tza'adim: Steps

Sikul: Cross

Dilug: Step-hop

Ritza: Running

*Hora Khedera*. Terms for this dance are in CD Selection 3.

Ma'agal: Circle

Haramat Yada'yim: Lift hands

Ktefa'yim: Shoulders

Akhizat Ktefayim: Hands on shoulders

Sivuv: Turn

Sivuv Bamakom: Turn in place

Akhizat Yada'yim: Hand hold

Akhizat Yadayim Chasidit: Left hand on one's own shoulder, palm up; right hand stretched forward to join left hand with person in front

Reki'aa: Stamp

Shehiya: Hold

Hanakhat A'kev: Heel touch on floor

Tza'ad: Step

Tza'adim: Steps

*Mi Li Yiten*. Terms for this dance are in CD Selection 5.

Lefanim: Forward

Tsa'ada Teymanit: Yemenite Step

Kfitza: Jump

Sgirat Regel: Close one foot to the other

Hanakhat A'kev: Heel touch on floor

Dilugim: Step hops

Hakafat Ben Zug: Do-si-do

*Debka Kafrit*. Terms for this dance are in CD Selection 7

Reki'aa: Stamp

Reki'ot: Stamps

Kfitza Al Shtey Raglayim: Jump on both feet

Shehiya: Hold

Hafnayat Kaf Regel: Turn the foot

# *Simkhu Na*

Notated by  
Jill Beck and Salla Saarikangas  
as taught by  
Ayalah Goren-Kadman  
at The Juilliard School, 1992 and  
Connecticut College, 1993

Music: traditional, arrangement by  
Alan Terricciano

Dance score checked by  
Ray Cook

## **Labanotation Reading Level:**

Low Intermediate

## **Theory and Score-reading Elements:**

Parts of the leg  
Tilts of the chest  
Turns of the head



## 1.10 SIMKHU NA. NOTES ON STYLE AND INTERPRETATION

*Simkhu Na* is an Israeli dance showing Eastern European influence.

*Simkhu Na* means “rejoice.” As its name implies, it is an energetic, lighthearted dance. *Simkhu Na* is one example of a circle dance that is not titled “Hora,” although hora has become a generic term for circle dances of an energetic, high-spirited nature. This dance certainly embodies those elements of the hora style, in its brightly lifted knees and an emphasis on the pleasure of group dancing.

*Simkhu Na* was choreographed in the 1960s by Yonatan Gavac. It is a dance in the so-called Israeli style. The definition of the Israeli style is vague, and basically comprises the dances that do not fall into the other three more specific style categories (Hassidic, Yemenite or Arabic). These dances are often very influenced by the music and movements of dances from the Eastern European countries to which many Israelis trace their recent roots.

*Simkhu Na* contains steps familiar from European folk dances and the character dances of ballet. The dance starts with a step that resembles “pas de basque” (measure 1). There are also polka-style steps of skipping and running (measures 13-16 and 29-32). The sideways swaying steps in measures 9-12 and 25-28 are probably borrowed from Hassidic dances. Refer to measures 17-24 of the *Hora Khedera* for an interesting comparison.

Measures 3-4 of *Simkhu Na* are referred to as the “stork step,” after the famously long-legged and high-stepping bird. There are alternate ways of performing the stork step, notated in the score and in the glossary. One version has the dancers balancing precariously on one foot, and another has them hopping past each other and back again. In all cases, lift the knees high, make the footwork crisp and acknowledge your partner as you dance. Having fun is the main goal of *Simkhu Na*. Because of the comical “stork step,” the dance has been nicknamed “Hora of the Crazy People.” It is a dance that sparks laughter and joyful comradeship.

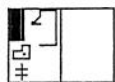
There is also a stage version of this dance by the same choreographer, with step variations, more arm movements, and patterns of travel for a large group.

1. The meter of the *Simkhu Na* is 4/4. In Selection 2 of the audio CD, there is a two-measure introduction and the dance is played twice through.

2. M= Men W= Women

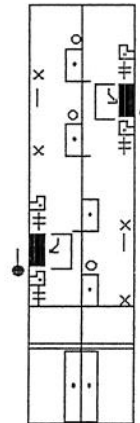
3. The knees are released throughout, and are resilient and bouncy in all of the springs.

4. Measure 1:

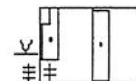


Partial support bow means that the gesture is partially weight-bearing (1/3 support). Spring onto the right foot to begin a *pas de basque* with the knees well lifted.

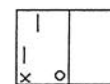
Knee reaches forward middle on both counts 1 and 2 (and 3 and 4) of the *pas de basque*.



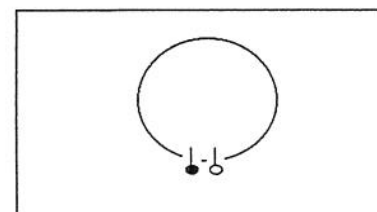
5. In the knee lifts (measure 1, etc.) the ankle is relaxed, in nearly a flexed position.



6. In measure 9, count 4, notice that the duration line is followed by an air line: the resulting movement is a leap. The same movement is repeated in measures 11, 25 and 27.



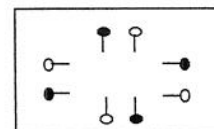
7. Floor plans show the formations of the dance and the dancers' relationship to their partner. The dance starts with any number of couples in a circle, facing in, the woman on the right side of the man.



8. A variation on the partners' circling:



Measures 29-32 can alternatively be performed with 2 1/4 clockwise circles. This extra travel has the effect of switching the partners' relative places in the large group circle, as they finish measure 32.



When the dance repeats, the other partner (the woman's part) will now move in measures 15-16 into the inner circle. Thus, with the variation, both partners get a chance to dance in the inner circle, and in the outer circle, in the couples section of the dance.

This variation requires extra-fast circling by the partners, adding to the hilarity of *Simkhu Na*.

### A variation of the "stork" step

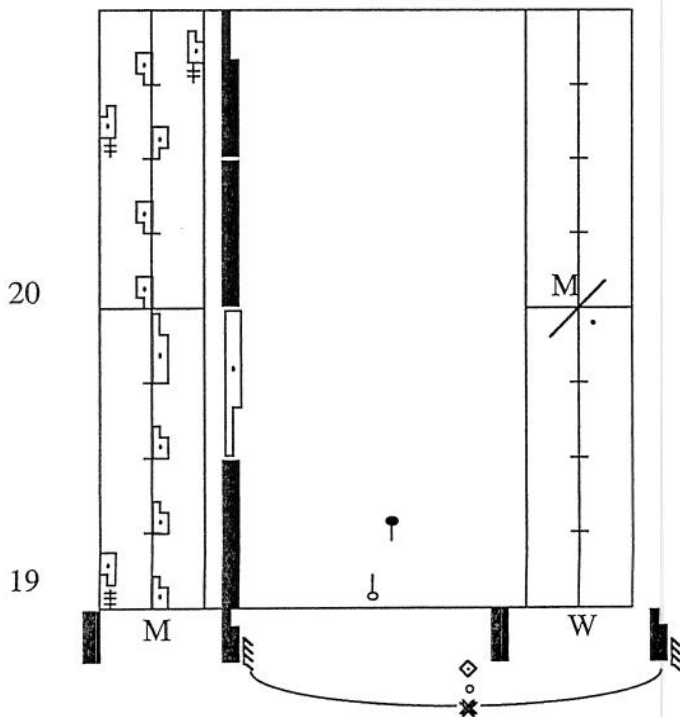
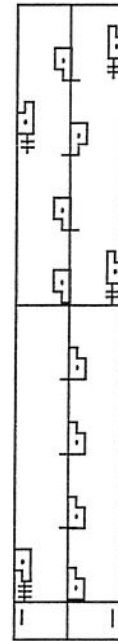
(The "stork" step occurs in measures 3-4 of the dance.)

Measure 3-4:

In a variation of the "stork" step, the hops and springs can be done moving forward (toward the center of the circle) and back (back to one's place in the circle).

4

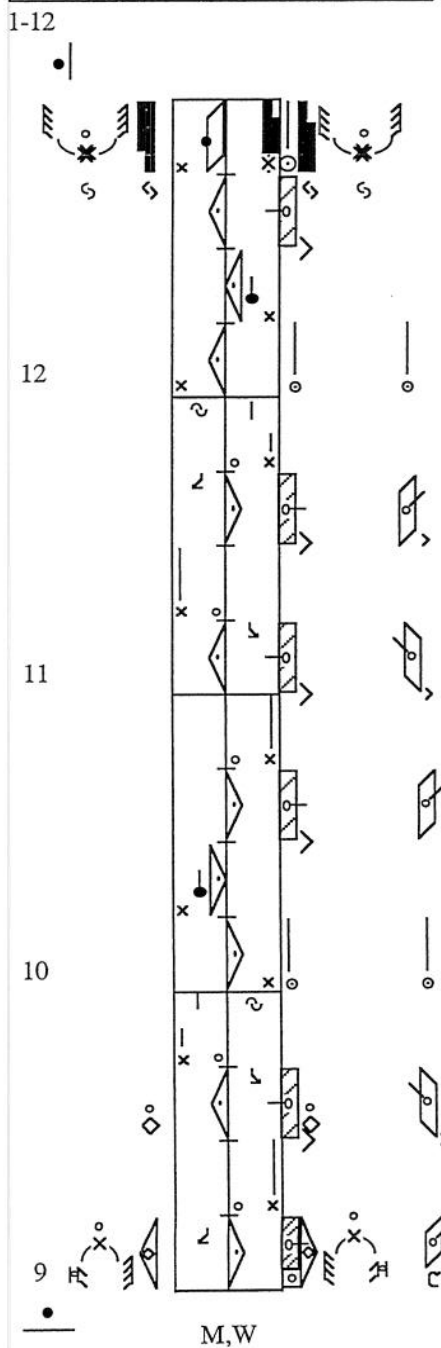
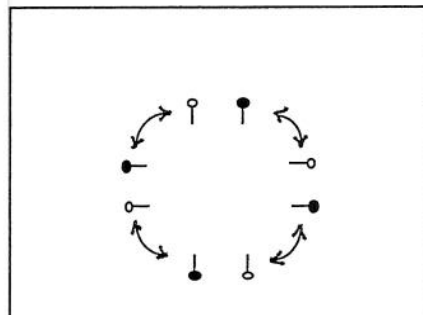
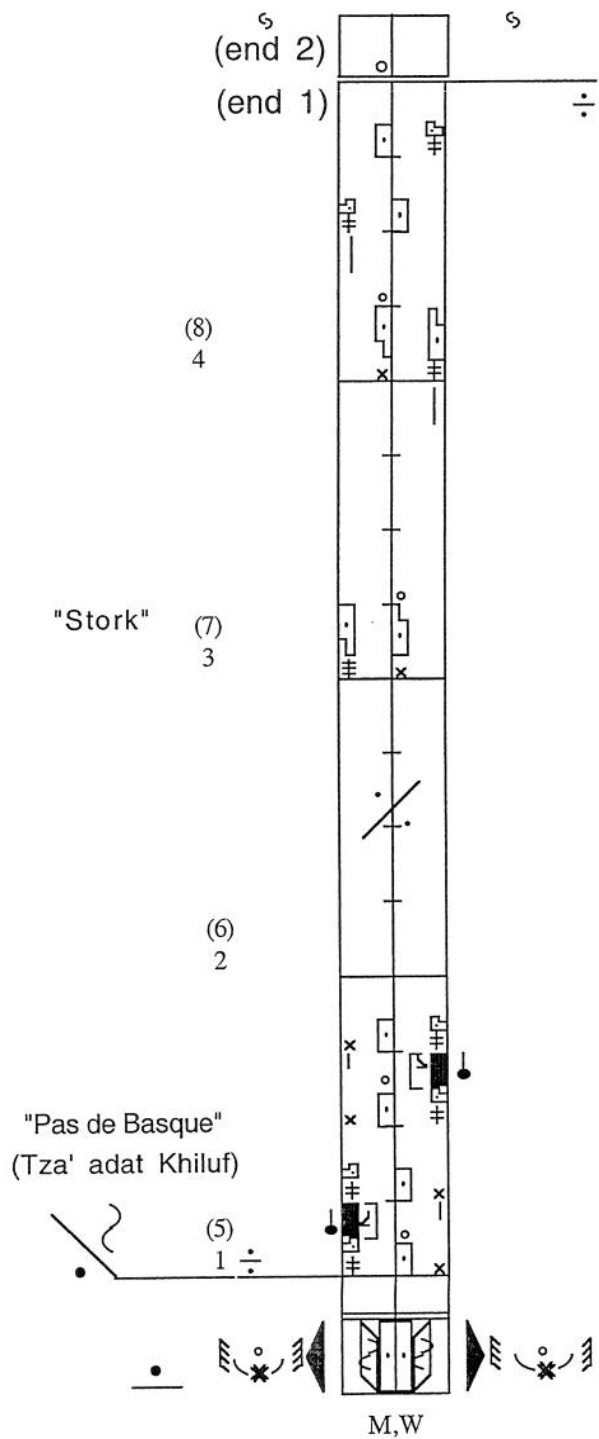
3



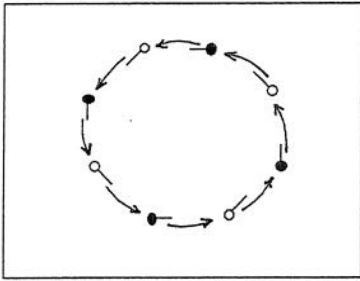
Measures 19-20:

When the variation of the "stork" is done in couples, the partners pass each other and then use their right arms to pull themselves backward.

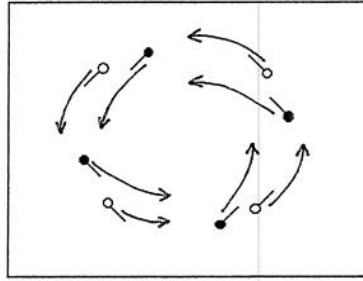
1.12 *Simkhu Na*  
Part 1: One circle



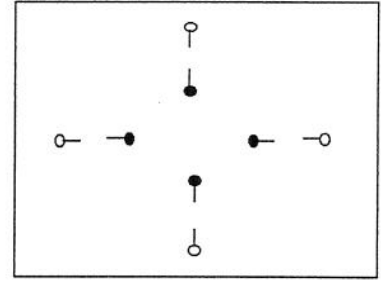
Simkhu Na (continued)



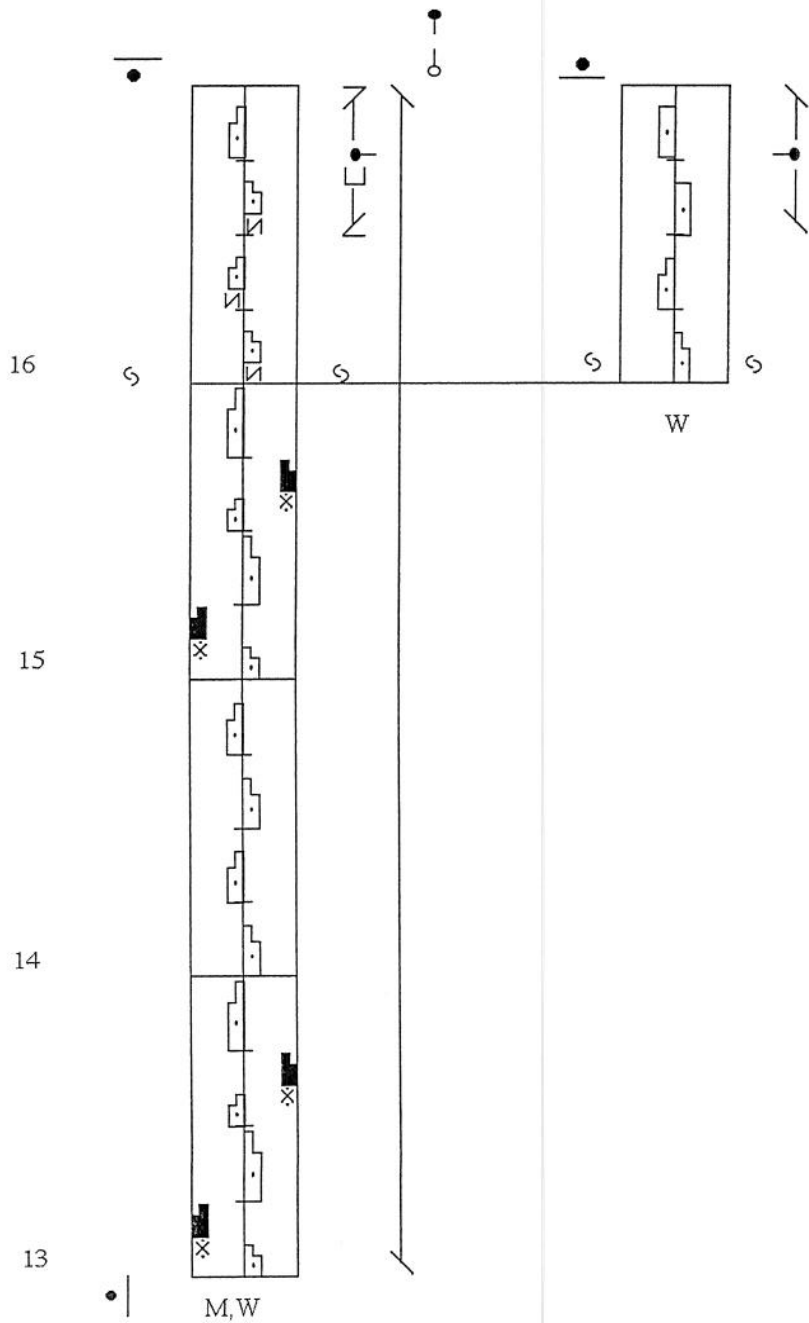
13-15



16



end 16

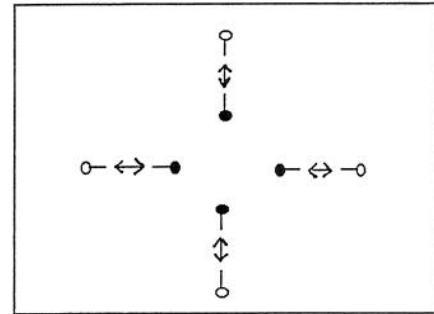




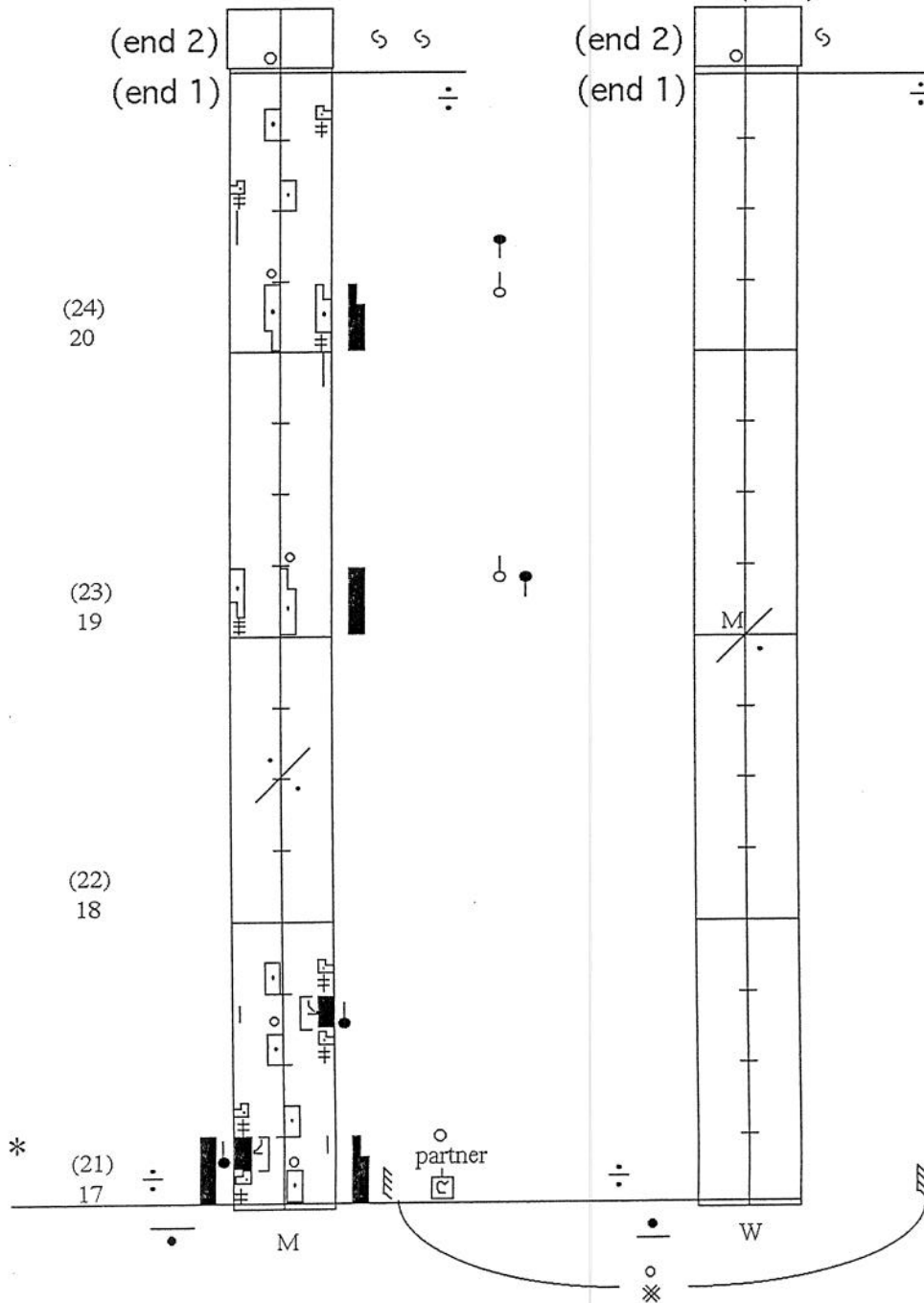
Simkhu Na (continued)

Part 2: Couples in a double circle

\* See Glossary for alternate performance of measures 17-24

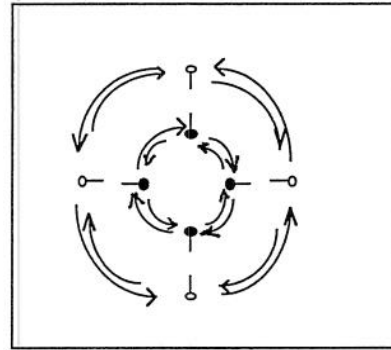


19-20 (23-24)

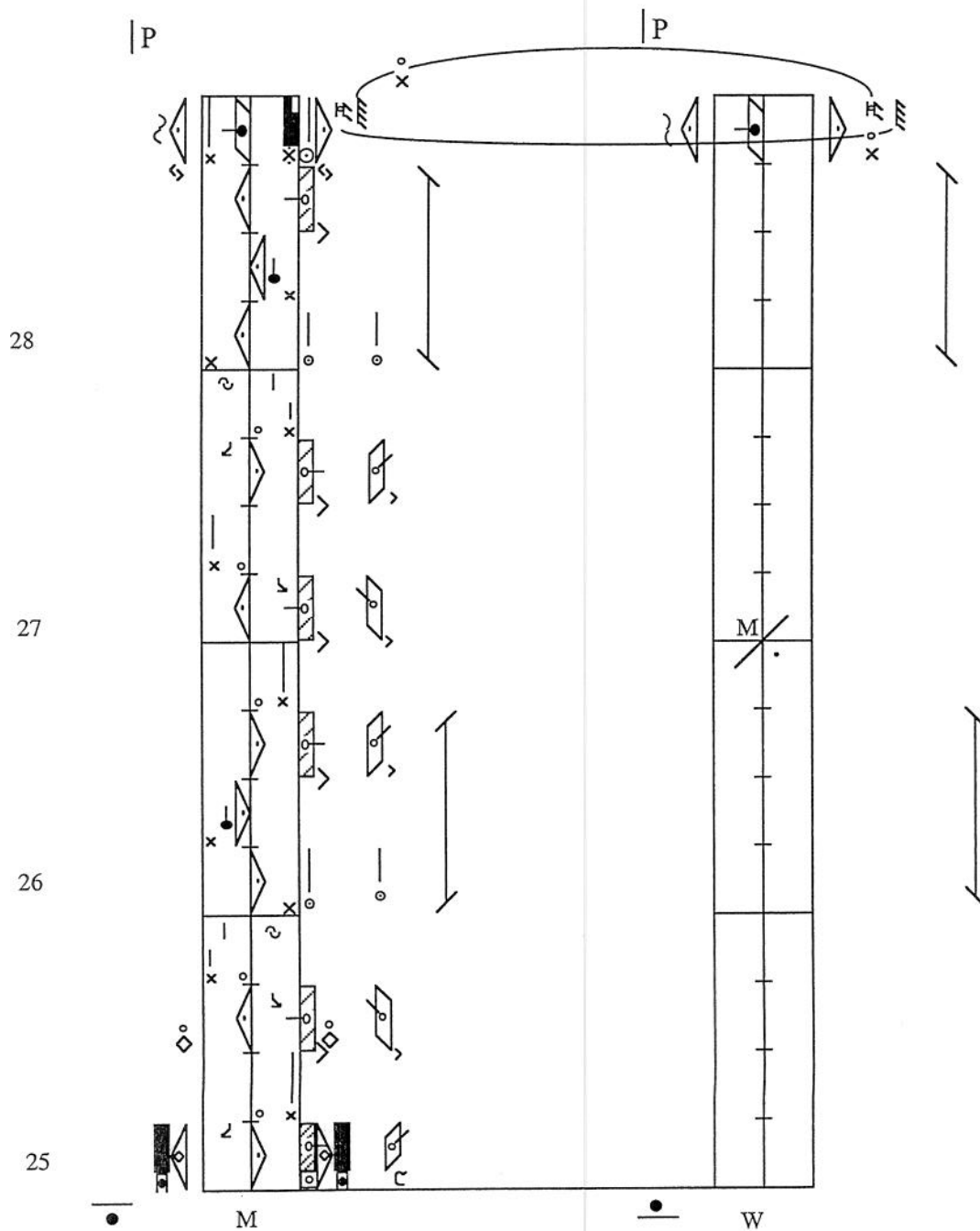


Simkhu Na (continued)

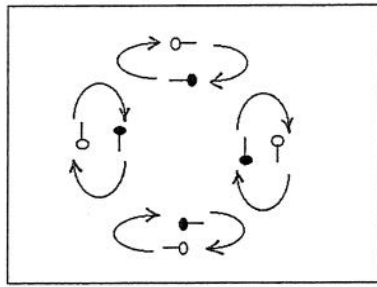
|P = partner is to your right.



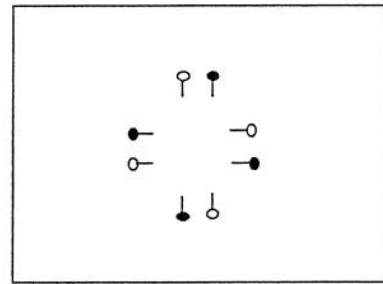
25-28



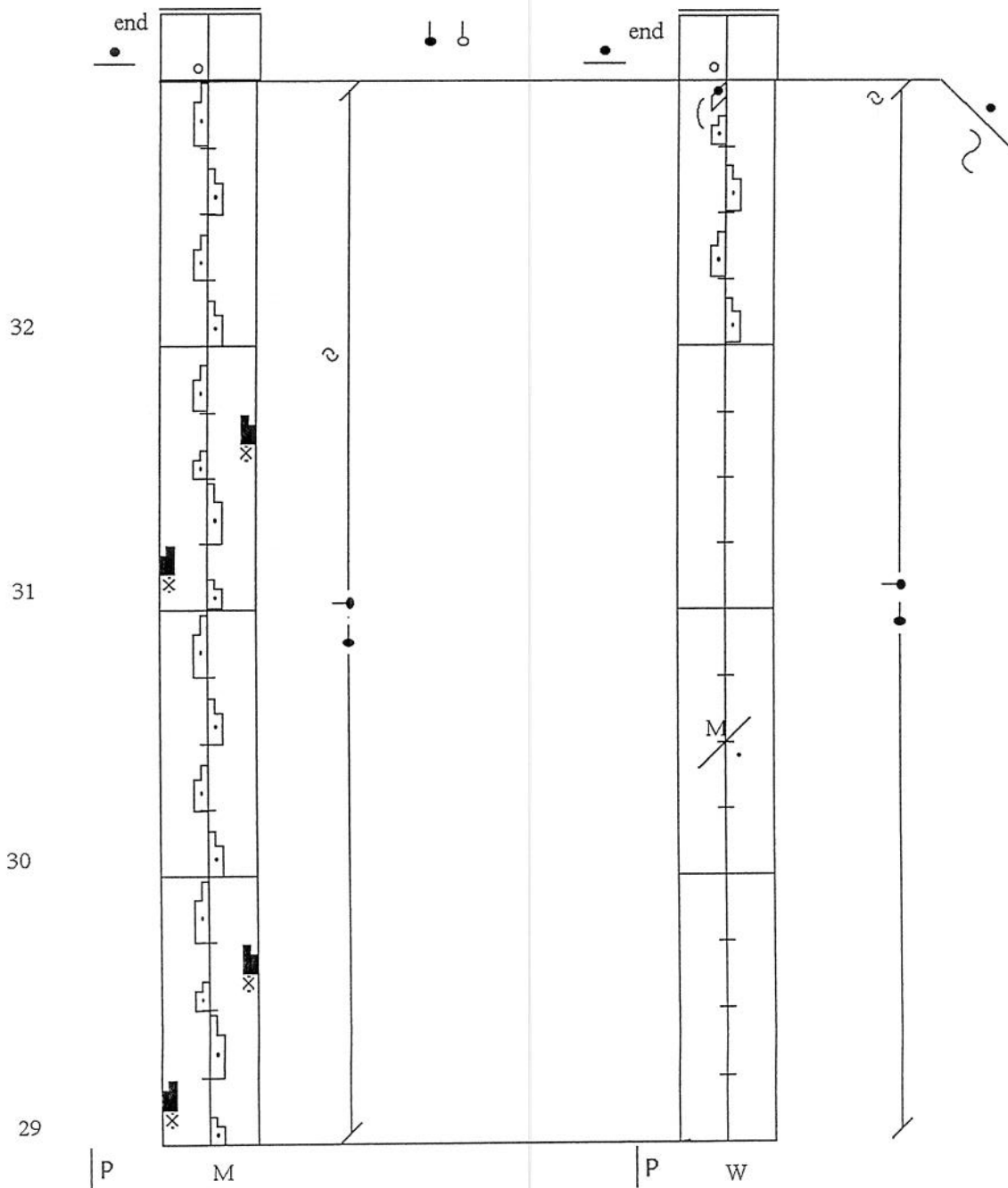
Simkhu Na (continued to end)



29-31 Partners circle clockwise



end of 32



# *Hora Khedera*

Notated by  
Jill Beck and Salla Saarikangas  
as taught by  
Ayalah Goren-Kadman  
at The Juilliard School, 1992 and  
Connecticut College, 1993

Music: traditional, arrangement by  
Alan Terricciano

Dance score checked by  
Ray Cook

## **Labanotation Reading Level:**

Low Intermediate

## **Theory and Score-reading Elements:**

Foot hooks  
Facing and tilts of the chest

### 1.13 HORA KHEDERA. NOTES ON STYLE AND INTERPRETATION

*Hora Khedera* is an Israeli dance showing Hassidic influence.

The Hassidim are a religious sect formed in the 18<sup>th</sup> century among the Jews in Eastern Europe. This sect is devoted to the preservation of a fundamentalist Jewish faith and strictly observes the rules in the Talmud.

To rejoice is a part of Hassidic religious practice. The Hassidim believe that singing and dancing enable the devoted to free themselves spiritually to commune with divine spirit. Therefore, singing and dancing are an important part of their religious experience, and these artful expressions are respected for their ability to raise people above worldly concerns.

The Hassidic style has exerted a major influence on Israeli folk dances. The following dance in the Hassidic style, *Hora Khedera*, was choreographed in the 1960s by Yacov Levy. The title of the dance is taken from its music and means “Hora from the village of Khedera.” The dance, however, does not represent anything literal about Khedera.

In the Hassidic culture, men and women are strictly separated from each other, and they certainly would not dance together. Indeed, they would not even dance in the same room. Less orthodox and secular Israelis, however, mix men and women together in dances.

*Hora Khedera* includes many recognizable Hassidic features. For example, the dancers hold hands in a typical Hassidic hand-hold with left hands on their own shoulders, palm up, and with right hands holding the palm of the person in front of them. (See starting position.) The dance opens with a step called the “Hassidic Shuffle,” which is performed with the heels never leaving the ground. This produces a sliding, shuffling effect. There are also finger snaps in the dance (measures 10, 12, 14, 16). Snaps as well as claps and “sparkles” (quick spreading actions of the fingers) characterize Hassidic dances and reflect their sense of exaltation.

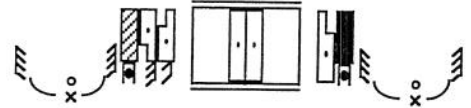
Simultaneous connection to both earth and heaven is expressed throughout the dance. The upper body and the arms lift and reach upward, toward heaven (see, for example, measures 2 and 10), while the lower body relates to the ground. Steps are earthy with the feet shuffling along the ground, and stamps strike the ground with sound. (See, for example, measures 17-24.) Knees remain released, and there are no springs. This dual dynamic reinforces both a sense of connectedness to the earth and a delight in reaching for transcendence.

There are three sections in the dance. Earth-bound shuffling dominates the first section (measures 1-8). In the second section, everyone turns into the circle and joins in joyful finger snaps, raising the arms toward heaven (measures 9-16). In the third section (measures 17-24), the dancers grasp each other’s shoulders and the group sways side to side as one body. One possible way to interpret the sequences of the dance is to see it as an homage first to the earth, then to heaven, and finally to community.

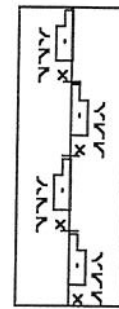


## 1.14 Hora Khedera Glossary

1. Starting position: The left arm is bent so that the hand is right above the shoulder with the palm facing up. Grasp the right hand of the dancer behind you. The right arm is forward middle with the palm facing down. Grasp the left hand of the dancer in front of you.



2. Measure 1: Shuffling steps (the Hassidic Shuffle). Slide forward on the heel, then transfer the weight onto the whole foot.

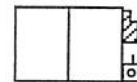


3. All touches of the heel or whole foot to the floor happen on the beat.

4. Measure 10: A finger snap.



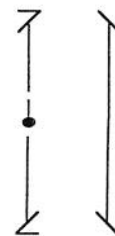
5. Measure 12: The front of the chest faces forward high. A sense of lift in the chest.



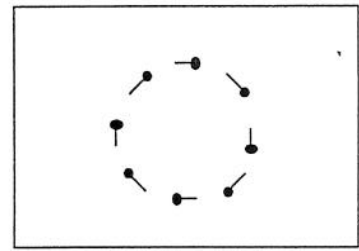
6. Measure 17: Your left hand grasps the outer side of the right upper arm of the person to your left.



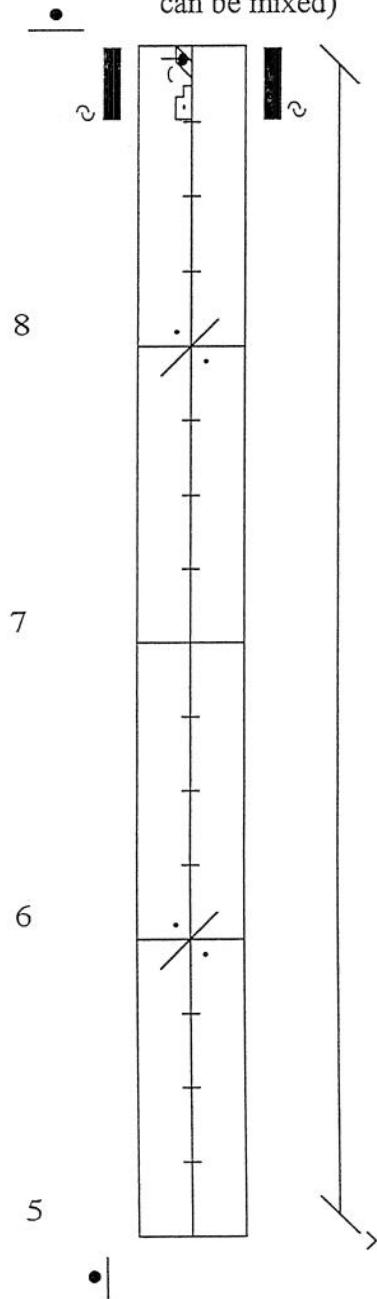
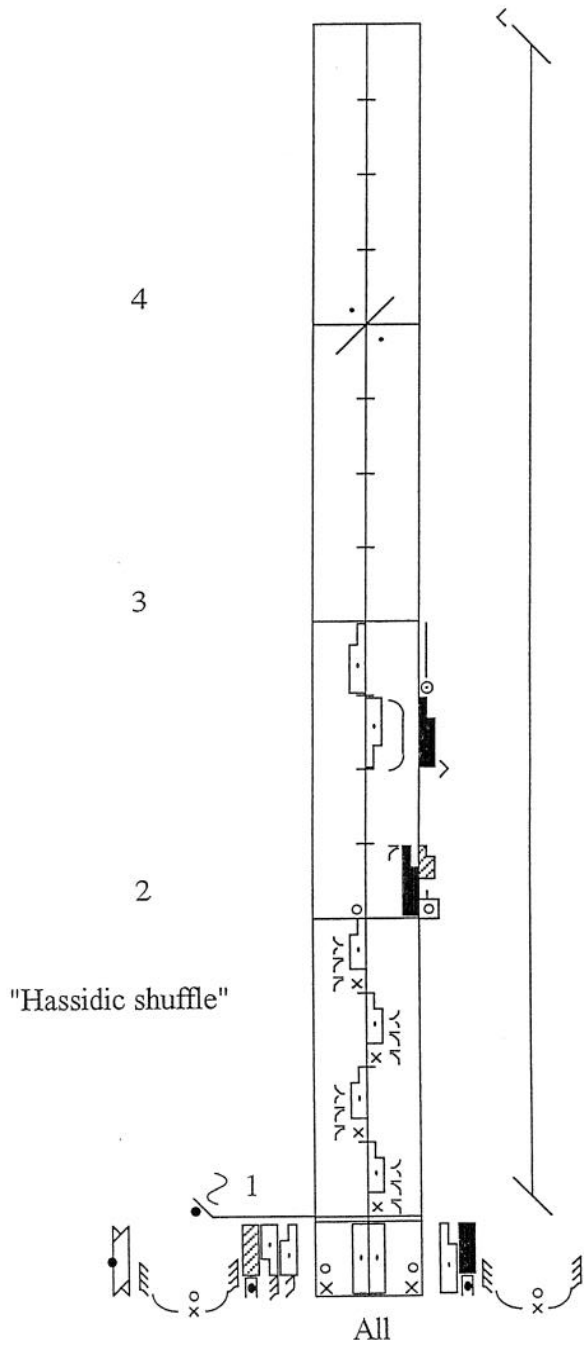
7. Measure 20: Dancers perform a 3-step turn to their right as the circle continues to revolve counter-clockwise.



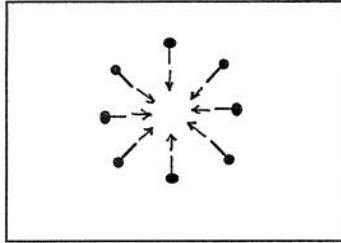
# 1.15 Hora Khedera, in the Hassidic style



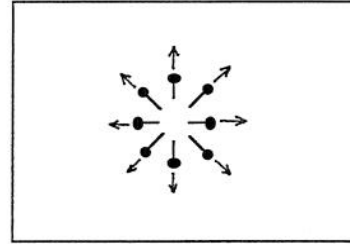
Starting position (genders can be mixed)



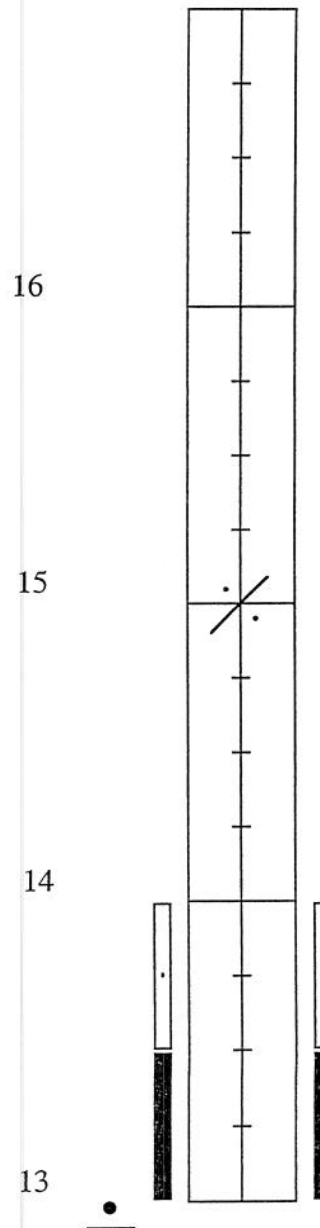
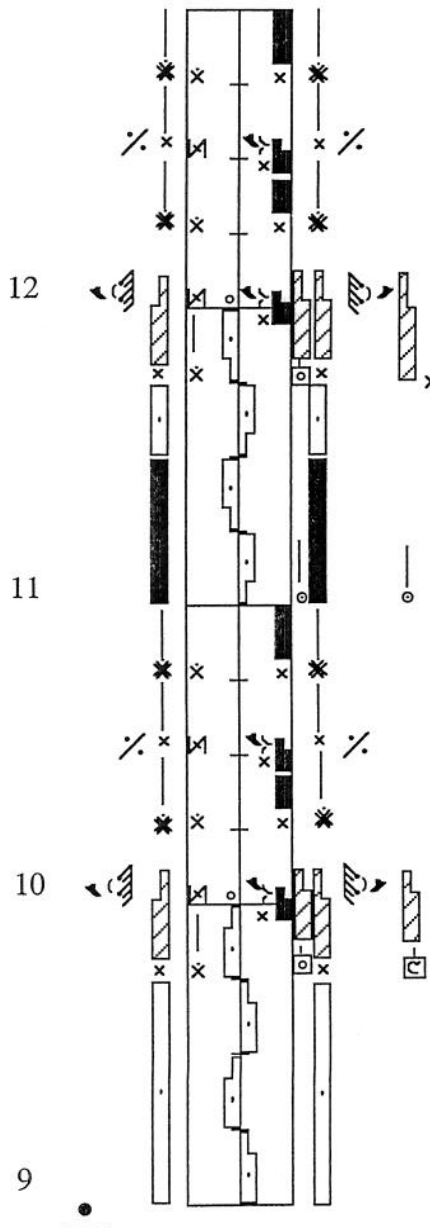
*Hora Khedera* (continued)

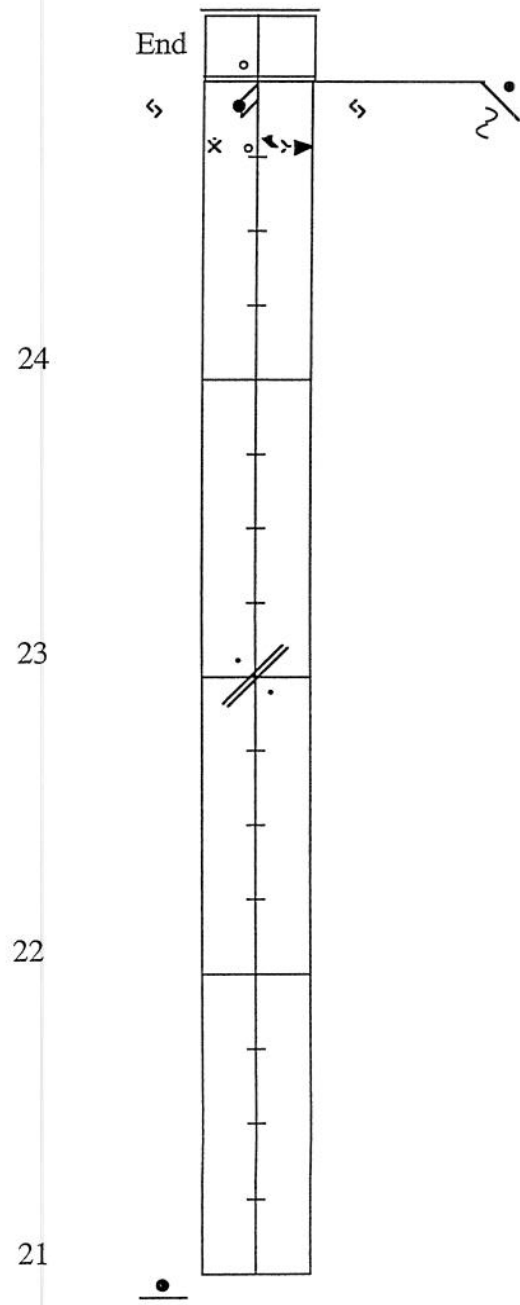
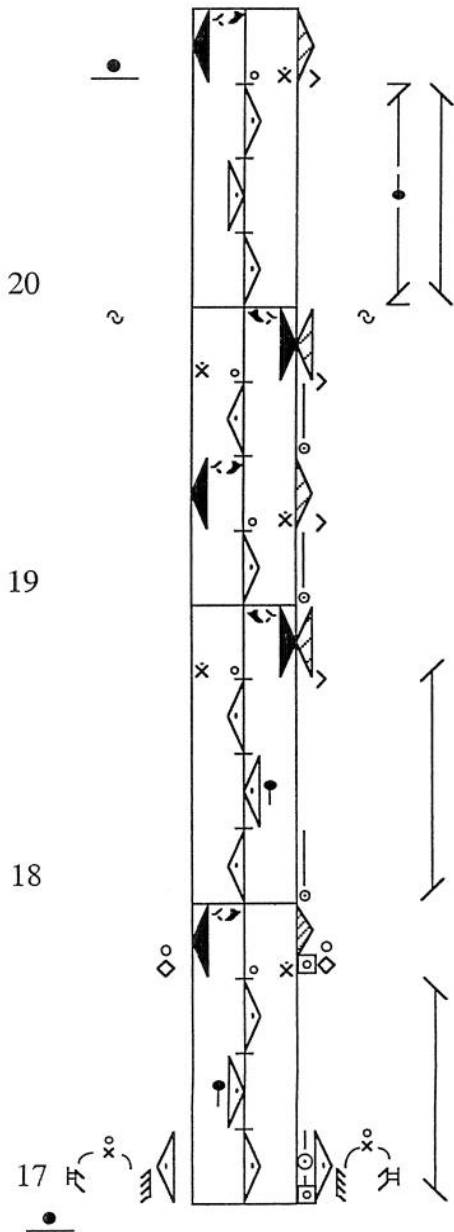


9 (13)



11 (15)





# *Mi Li Yiten*

Notated by  
Jill Beck and Elena Ioannou  
as taught by  
Ayalah Goren-Kadman  
at Connecticut College, 1993

Music: traditional, arrangement by  
Alan Terricciano

Dance score checked by  
Ray Cook

## **Labanotation Reading Level:**

Low Intermediate

## **Theory and Score-reading Elements:**

Parts of the arms  
Flexion  
Center of weight  
Small movements of the pelvis

## 1.16 *MI LI YITEN*. NOTES ON STYLE AND INTERPRETATION

*Mi Li Yiten* is an Israeli dance showing Yemenite influence.

The title of the dance *Mi Li Yiten* is taken from the lyrics of the song that originally accompanied it, and means “Who Will Give Me?” Seadia Amishai choreographed the dance in the 1970s.

*Mi Li Yiten* is a gentle, expressive couple dance in a formation of concentric circles. Men stand in the inner circle facing out; women stand in the outer circle facing into the center. In the Yemenite culture, which is the principle influence on this dance, men and women would not dance together. This is an Israeli innovation.

*Mi Li Yiten* shows its Yemenite influence in two typical step sequences. Dassa is a movement frequently found in the dances of Yemenite women. Steps swaying forward and back are accompanied by a very small pelvic movement in the same directions. There are many variations of the dassa using different rhythms. The effect of the dassa step is to make the center of weight fluid and responsive to change in directions of travel by the supports. The Yemenite step is found in measures 5-7 and 27-28. It consists of a step to each side, and then a step crossing in place. This sequence is performed with a small, soft bouncing action down and up. The bouncing is motivated by the body’s center of weight and is enhanced by relaxed knees that responsively bend and straighten. As noted in the glossary, soft, bouncing movements and flexible knees are important characteristics of the Yemenite style. There is speculation concerning the origin of this gentle bounciness. According to Ayalah Goren-Kadman, some dance observers have argued that it could be influenced by the movement of camels, or by walking in desert sand. Others have suggested that living in the Diaspora prevented the Yemenites from relating to land and territory as closely as other cultures, and that this experience gave their dances an unfixed, floating quality. Whether these speculations have any value is open to question, but they may help dancers develop potential points of empathy with the dance.

Ms. Goren-Kadman suggests that the use of the hands and wrists in measures 21-24 may be indicative of Eastern influences on the Yemenites. These circular hand movements may be a general expression of choreography for the hands that characterizes, for example, classical Indian dances. Refer to *Krishna Steals the Bittersweets* in Chapter 3 for a comparison. By displacing some of the performers' attention into their lightest extremities, the hands and fingers, *Mi Li Yiten* further decreases its sense of weightedness, and heightens its Yemenite style.

Traditionally, Yemenite dances use percussion and song as their accompaniment. Israelis have added other instruments as they have developed dances in the Yemenite style, but they have retained the authentically Yemenite use of minor keys.

The phrasing of this Yemenite-influenced dance shows a typical alternation between steps grouped in repetitions of threes and of fours. Note how the musical structure of *Mi Li Yiten* differs from the other Israeli dances in this chapter. It is less regular than the

others. There are two main sections in the dance. The first is 10 measures long, an unusual length. Within the 10-measure phrase, the first and second step sequences are each two measures long, while the third and fourth sequences take three measures each. This choreographic subdivision does not follow the internal structure of the 10-measure musical phrase. While the music proceeds in two groupings of 5 measures, which can be diagrammed as

$$\begin{array}{c} \frown \\ 5 \\ \smile \\ 3+2 \end{array} + \begin{array}{c} \frown \\ 5 \\ \smile \\ 5 \end{array} = 10,$$

the movement crosses this pattern, following its own internal logic:

$$\begin{array}{c} \frown \\ 4 \\ \smile \\ 2+2 \end{array} + \begin{array}{c} \frown \\ 6 \\ \smile \\ 3+3 \end{array} = 10$$

The second section of the dance is a more standard 8 measures in length, and it is also divided more squarely into step sequences that are two or four measures long. This section of the dance also sits more firmly on its music. However, in the dance overall the interplay of step sequences that are two and three measures in length may feel restless or unsettled. It is interesting to experience how this vacillation reinforces the unfixed quality generated by the dance's mobile center of weight (felt in the bounciness of the Yemenite step and the sway of the dassa step). There is a complementary effect between the metrical groupings in the dance's compositional structure and some of the actions choreographed for the body.

Although *Mi Li Yiten* is a gentle dance, with many rounded edges (the hand circles, the concentric circle formation), it is also a very rhythmic one. Measures 8-10 are particularly compelling in their rhythm. Accompanying a springing action to the side, the arms carve a path across the body, led by the fingertips. This is followed by finger snaps and light foot stamps. The overall effect is of highly defined counts and more sharply edged movement, creating contrast in the dance. The lightness of the Yemenite style, however, is never totally absent.



## 1.17 *Mi Li Yiten* Glossary

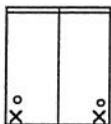
### Floor Plans

The formation of the dancers is shown with one large floor plan at the start of the dance.

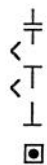
Smaller floor plans are included to show the dancers' relationship to their partners. The paths shown are simplified.

Knees are soft throughout.

### Symbols



Starting position: Knees remain released throughout the dance.



Measure 1: Pelvis moves slightly towards forward middle, back middle, and to place middle (center).



Measure 3: A finger snap



Measure 3: Chest tilts halfway towards side high.



Measures 4-5: Center of gravity moves up and down producing a gentle bouncing action.



Measure 5: Arms are down. Exact position is up to the performer. The arms are not held in a frozen position.



Measure 8: Left arm moves to right side low led by the fingertips. The arm crosses in front of the body.

*Mi Li Yiten* Glossary (continued)

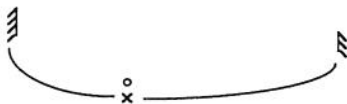
Measure 20: Design drawing is used to show the movement of the hands. Seen from the right side, the hands draw parallel circles moving up towards the body, then forward and down.



Measure 21: Track pins. The pin on the top indicates that something, in this instance the hand, is in front of the body and very slightly to the left of the center line of the body. The pin on the bottom indicates the same thing on the right side.



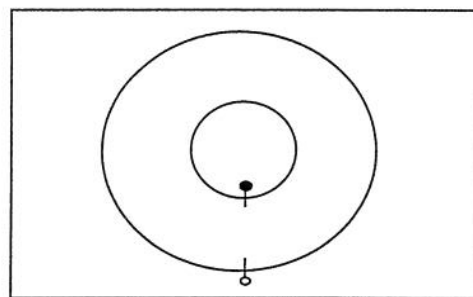
Measure 21: 2/3 support. The supporting leg carries only partial weight. The weight is lifted in an almost-spring.



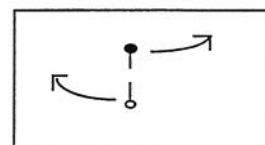
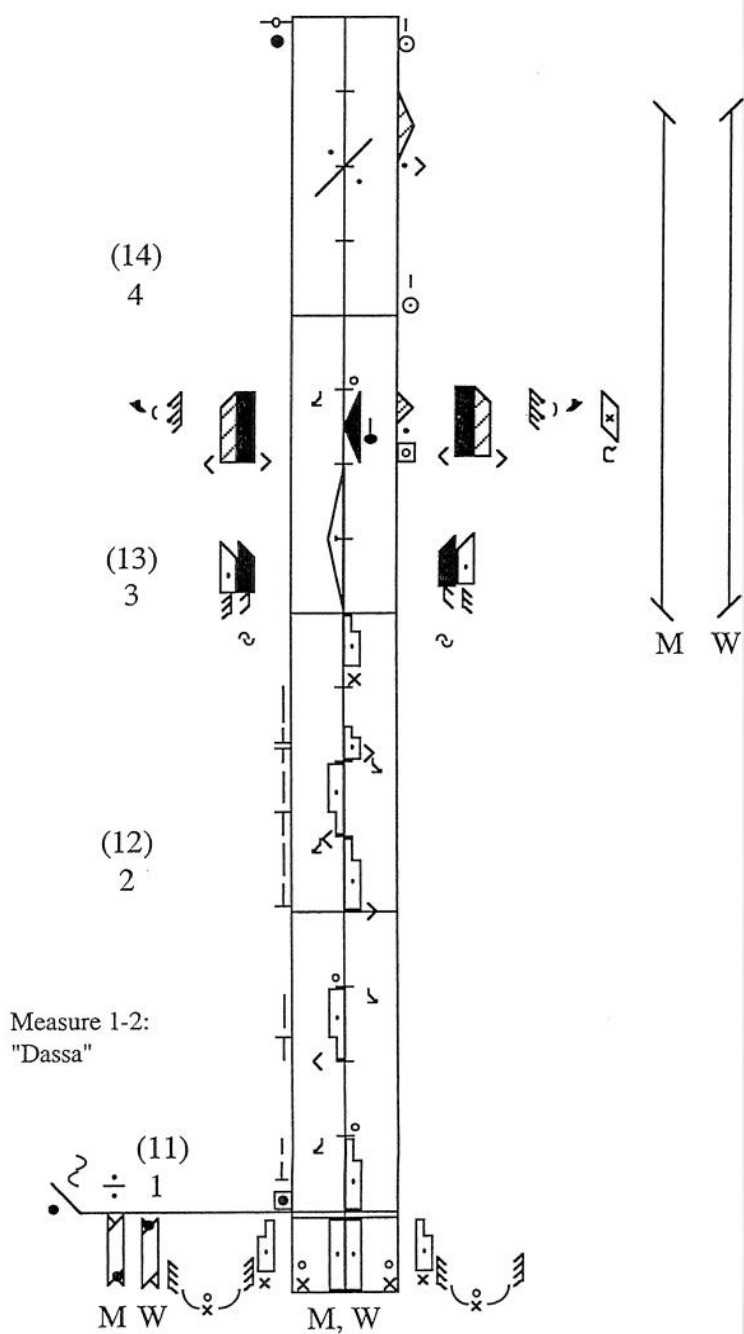
Measure 25: Left hand grasps the right wrist.

Note: It is not important to the choreography which hand does the grasping. You could also grasp the left wrist with the right hand.

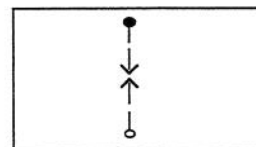
1.18 *Mi Li Yiten*



Starting position

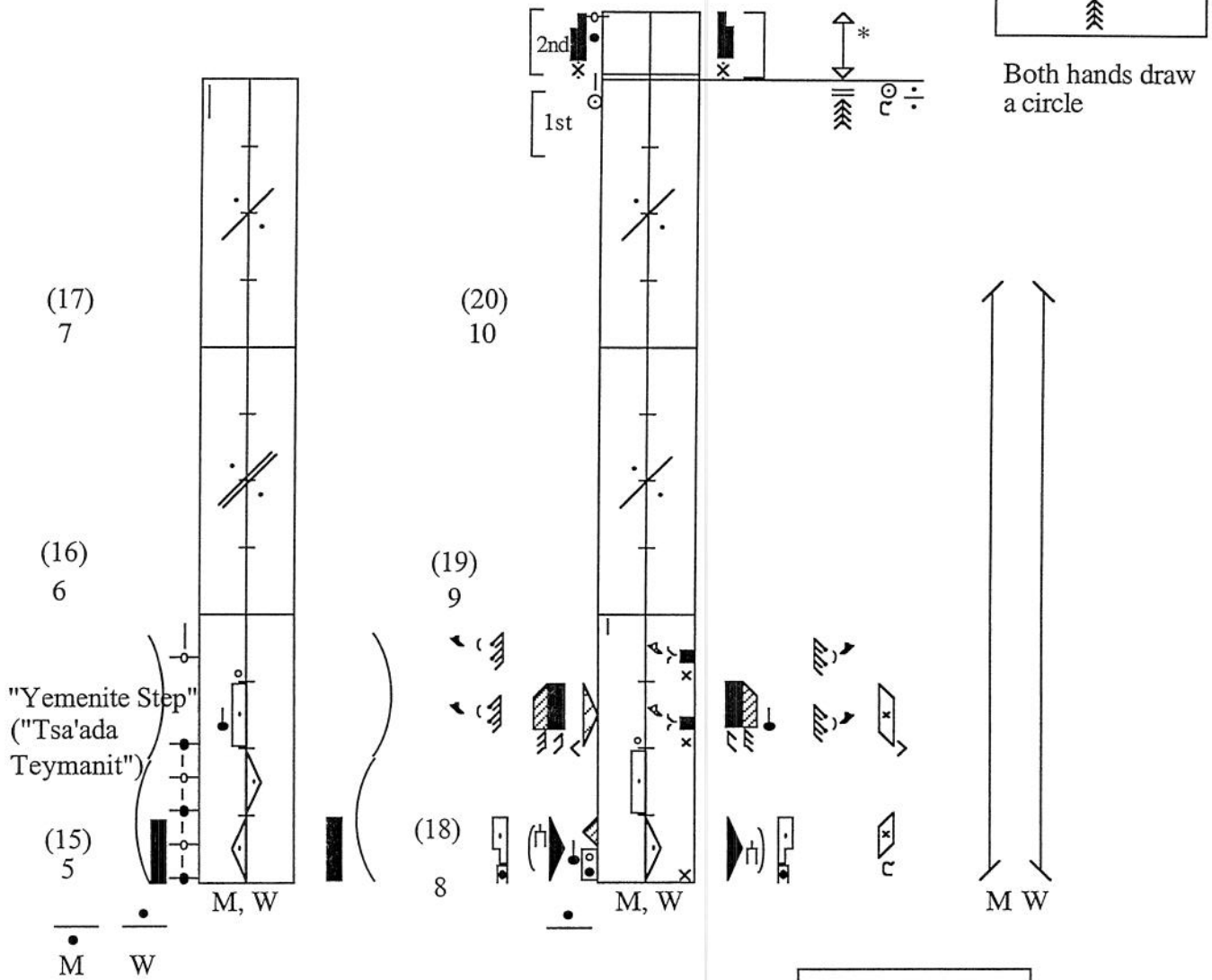


3-4

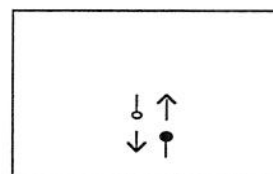
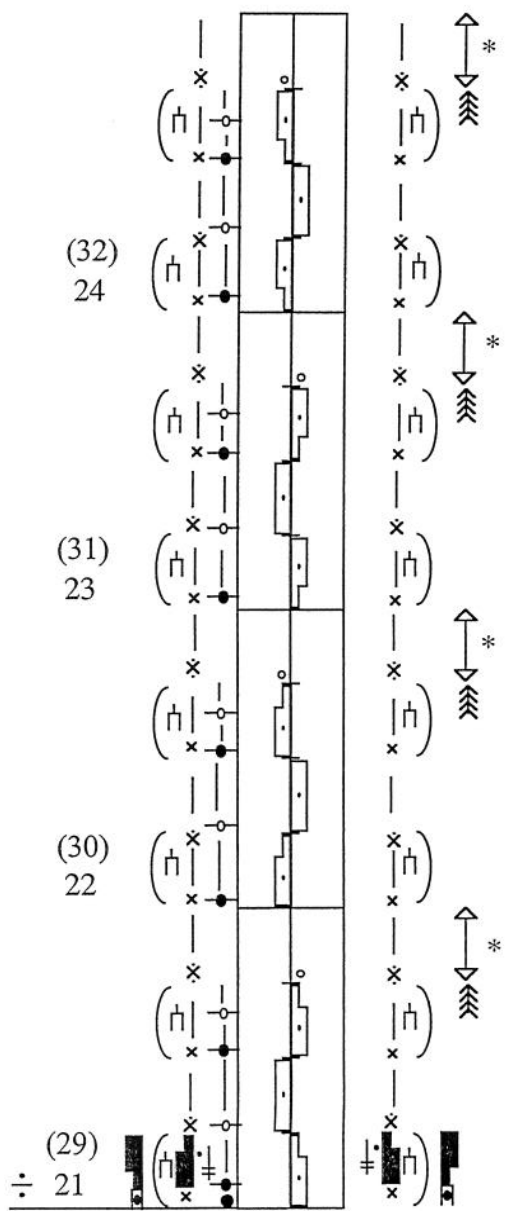


1-2

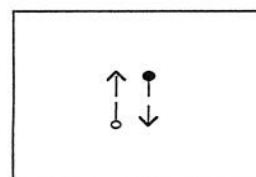
Mi Li Yiten (continued)



*Mi Li Yiten* (continued)



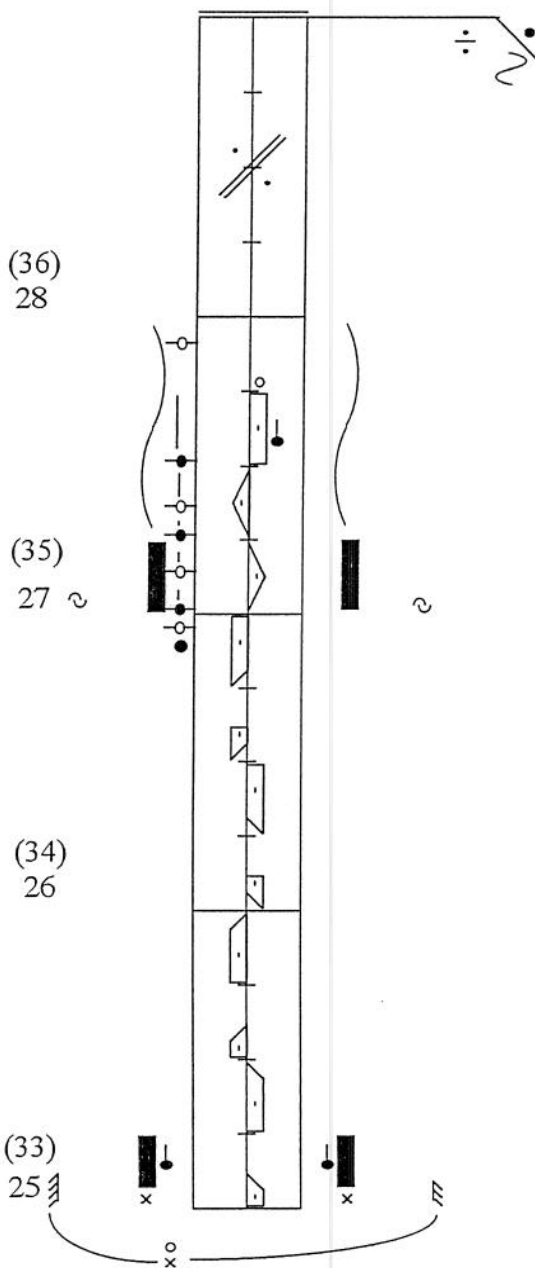
23-24 (31-32)



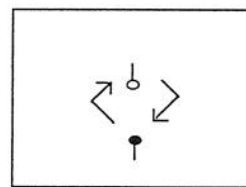
21-22 (29-30)

*Mi Li Yiten* (continued to end)

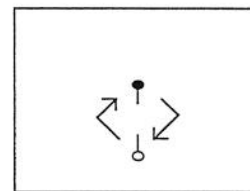
Measures 27-28:  
"Yemenite step"  
("Tsa'ada Teymanit")



Measures 25-26:  
"Do-Si-Do"  
("Hakafat Ben Zug")



26 (34)



25 (33)

# *Debka Kafrit*

Notated by  
Jill Beck and Salla Saarikangas  
as taught by  
Ayalah Goren-Kadman  
at The Juilliard School, 1992 and  
Connecticut College, 1993

Music: traditional, arrangement by  
Alan Terricciano

Dance score checked by  
Ray Cook

## **Labanotation Reading Level:**

Low Intermediate

## **Theory and Score-reading Elements:**

Foot hooks  
Parts of the leg (hip, knee, and ankle)  
Focal points in turns

### 1.19 *DEBKA KAFRIT*. NOTES ON STYLE AND INTERPRETATION

*Debka Kafrit* is an Israeli dance showing Arabic influence.

*Debka Kafrit* shows considerable Arabic influence; many of the movements in the dance are actual sequences appropriated from Arabic dances, arranged and slightly modified by the Israeli choreographer Yacov Levy. The dance was created in the 1960s to music by D. Carmel, and its title means *Village Debka*. The term debka is a generic name applied to many different Arabic line dances.

*Debka Kafrit* is one such line dance. Dancers hold hands and follow the dancer at the head of the line, who leads the traveling paths. Authentic Arabic dances have no prescribed order of steps, but rely on decisions by the leader or by the musician to determine what comes next. The Arabic-influenced Israeli dances, however, are choreographed in advance and their set patterns are learned.

Arabic dances are often described as strong, earthy, stamping and rhythmical. All of these qualities characterize *Debka Kafrit*. There is nothing withheld or timid about the dance, starting with its confident opening stamps (measures 1-2). The dancers show pride and confidence by leaning slightly away from their stamping feet, heads held high and looking toward the sound of their stamps. Step sequences throughout the dance are firm and weighted, connecting the dancers securely to the ground beneath them. It is interesting to compare the solidity and anchored rhythms of *Debka Kafrit* with the transience and lightness of *Mi Li Yiten*.

The structure of traditional Arabic dances is always a repeating chorus followed by variations on a theme. *Debka Kafrit* follows this traditional structure, with an 8-measure chorus that opens the dance, and three variations. The chorus, which is repeated between variations, consists of stamps on the left foot followed by diagonal steps moving forward, with the hips swaying slightly from side to side. The variations build on the theme of a side stamp to the left followed by a closing with the right foot. The variations are 4 measures long and are performed twice to make 8-measure phrases.

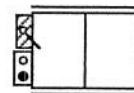
The first variation (measures 9-16) presents the simple stamp and close theme with bending and straightening of the knees. The second variation (measures 25-32) adds a spring, which increases the sense of drop and accent as the dancers move to the left while simultaneously lifting their right knees. The accented landing is followed by a moment (one count) of stillness, strengthening the accent further. Downward movement develops even more force in the third variation (measures 41-48), in which a slide is added. This variation also adds a turn, giving more 3-dimensional volume and even a sense of attack to the movement.

The conclusion of each variation is always the same: three springs moving to the right. The flexed ankle of the gesturing leg in these springs is one other small detail contributing to the assertive character of *Debka Kafrit*.

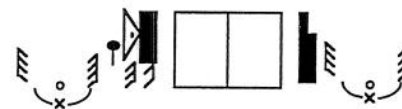


1.20 *Debka Kafrit* Glossary

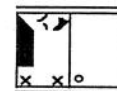
1. • = person in front of you. The dance is performed in a line which travels as led by the first dancer in the line.
2. Knees are relaxed throughout the dance, except where straight knees are specifically indicated (as in M. 9, Ct. 3).
3. Starting position: The torso tilts slightly (1/3 of the way) towards the right back diagonal.



4. Arm and hand positions throughout the dance: left arm crosses behind the back. Right arm is forward, with your right hand grasping the left hand of the person in front of you.

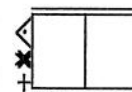


5. Measure 1, count 1: Stamping the right foot. The leg is bent and closer to the supporting leg than a normal left forward diagonal gesture.

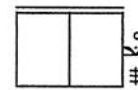


6. All touches of the foot to the floor, throughout the dance, occur on the beat.

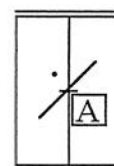
7. Measure 3, count 1: The left hip moves a very small amount to left side middle.



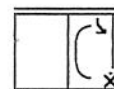
8. Measure 11, count 4: The ankle remains flexed until the assemblé in Measure 12.



9. Measures 17-24: An identical repeat of section A (the chorus).



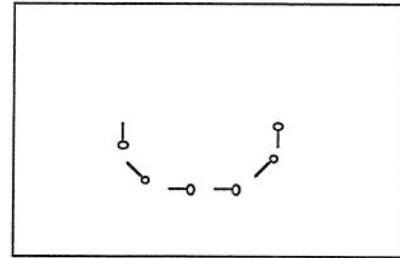
10. Measure 41, count 1: The right ball of the foot remains on the floor as the leg bends. The right leg bears partial weight.



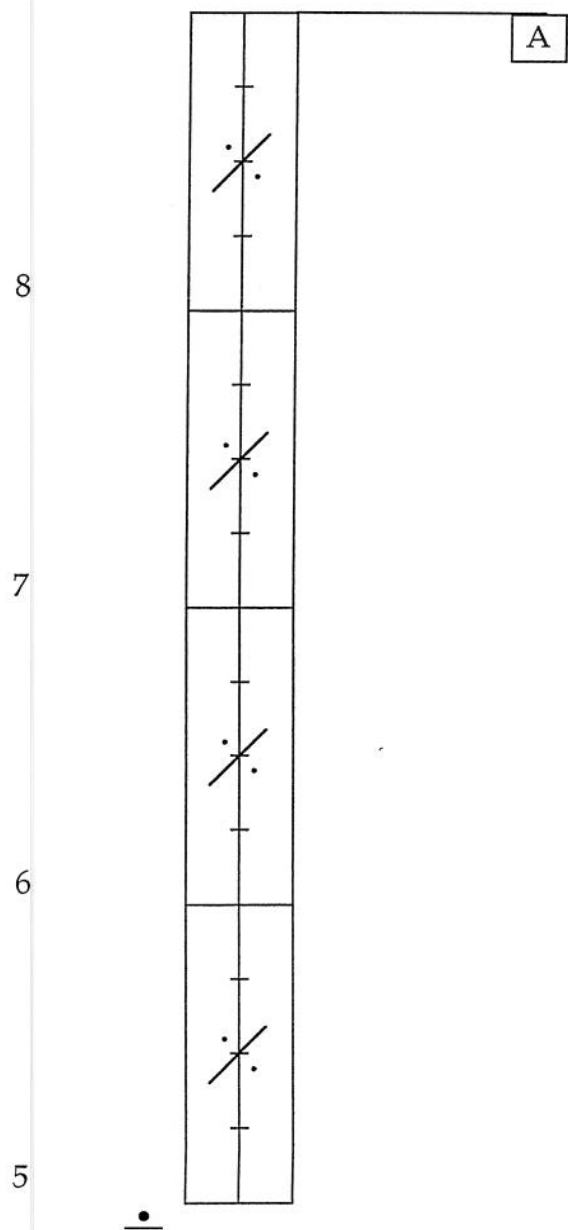
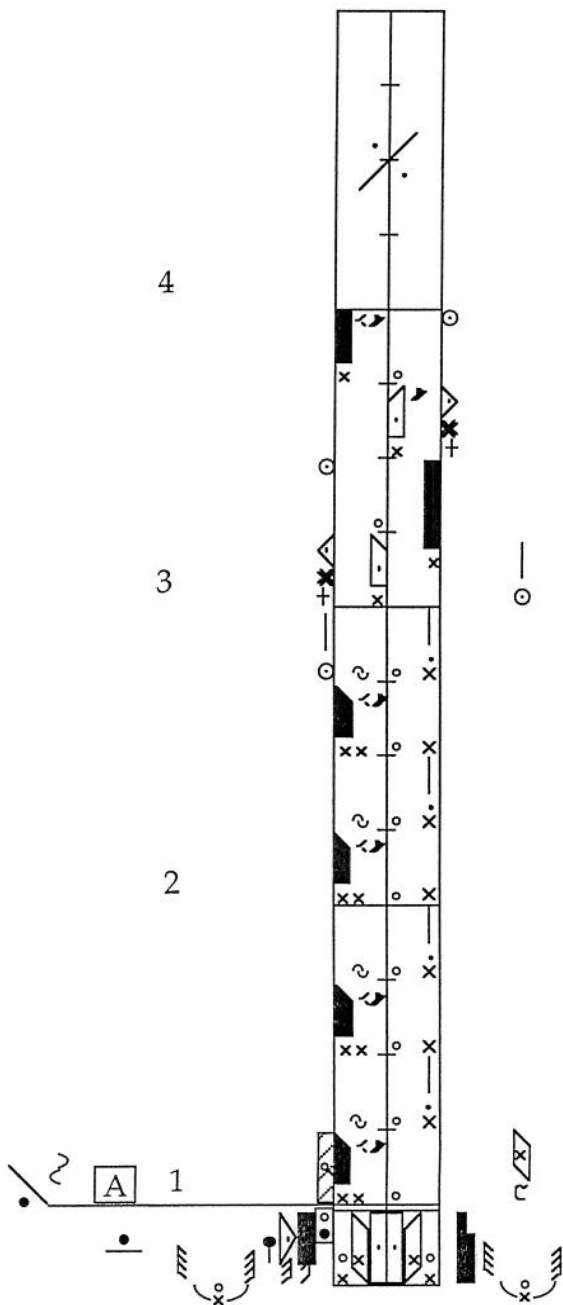
### 1.21 *Debka Kafrit*

Section A (measures 1-8) is the CHORUS. It is repeated between each variation.

• = person in front of you

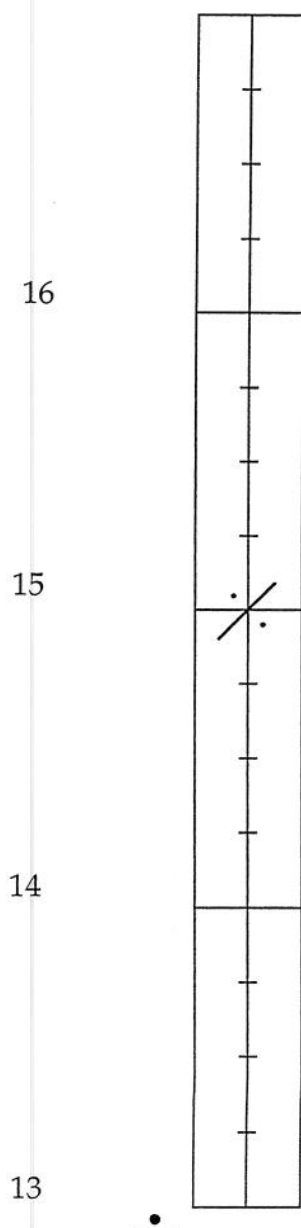
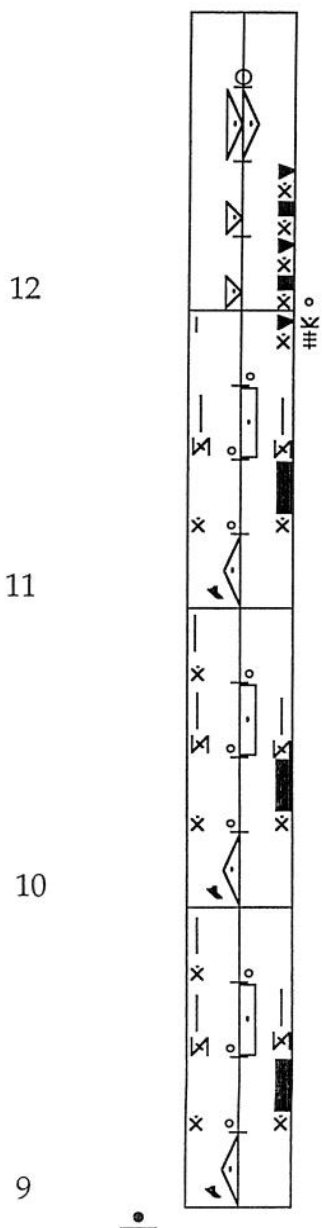


Starting position



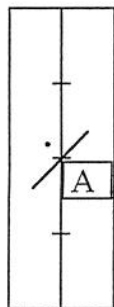
Debka Kafrit (continued)

FIRST VARIATION



CHORUS and SECOND VARIATION

24  
|  
17

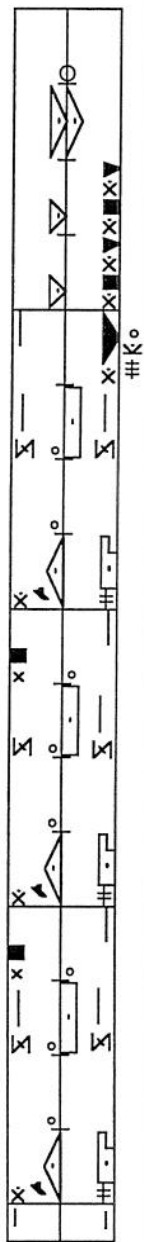


28

27

26

25

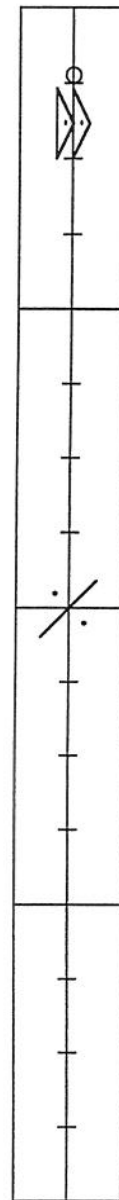


32

31

30

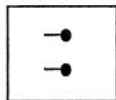
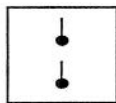
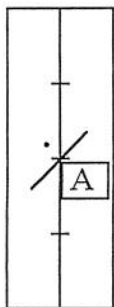
29



Debka Kafrit (continued)

CHORUS and THIRD VARIATION

40  
|  
33

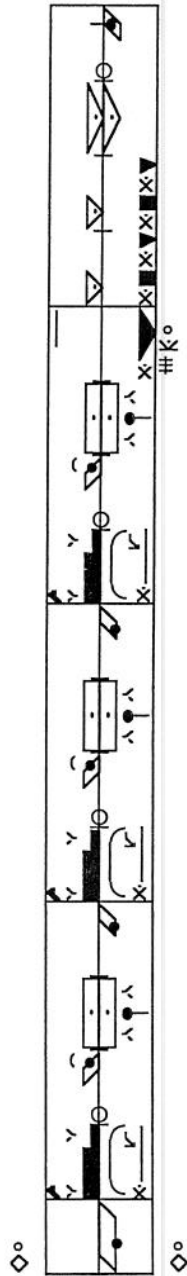


44

43 | •

42 | •

41 | •

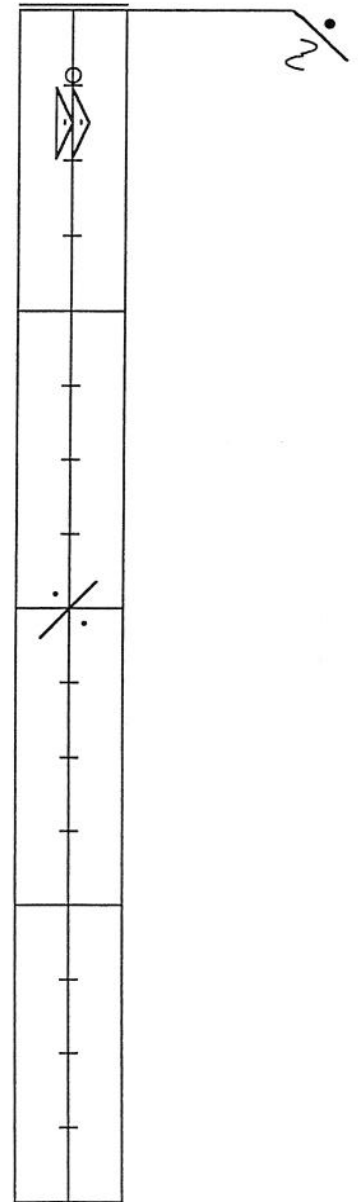


48

47

46

45



| • = The person who was in front of you is now to your right.

The arms react naturally to the turning in the body, maintaining the hand-hold.

## 1.22 CONCLUSION

Israeli dances recognize and celebrate the diversity of their society. The four dances in this chapter are illustrative of the choreographic sources of inspiration Jews have brought to Israel from their varied histories in the Diaspora. Rather than attempting to refine a single national identity for the country's new folk dances, Israeli choreographers and dance pioneers created dances that express multiplicity, recombination, and the possibility of integrating diverse parts into a cohesive whole.

The actual contributions that groups such as Eastern European Jews, Hassidim, Yemenites, and Arabs bring to Israeli society are symbolically acknowledged in Israeli dances. Even across the four dances in this chapter, it is possible to recognize specific steps, hand-holds, and movement qualities of these groups appearing in different choreographic arrangement and combination.

Israeli schools and social groups have consciously used folk dancing as a means of building community. The varied nature of Israeli dances allows different groups to actively engage aspects of each other's cultural identities and histories. In this process, dancing becomes participation in shared experience, with the goal of building recognition and respect between groups.

Also, energetic dances dominate. One of the most obvious effects of performing Israeli dances is an experience of raised emotions. *Simkhu Na's* theme is to rejoice. The *Hora Khedera* celebrates life, connection to the divine, and immersion in a spirited community. *Debka Kafrit's* movement is assertive and pronounced, a physicalization of group solidarity. These three dances offer intense kinesthetic experiences that are uplifting. They are examples of the success of an artistic and social program that assimilated disparate threads of influence into a complex new dance tradition, to show respect for a diverse population, while literally creating good feeling that would rebound on Israeli society as a whole.

## 1.23 ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>In Judaism there is Written and Oral Tradition. Written Tradition is the Torah (the five books of Moses, the Prophets, and Later Writings making up the Hebrew Bible). The Talmud refers to the Oral Tradition. It interprets and applies the Written Tradition to everyday life for Jews. The Talmud is made up of the Mishna and the Gemara and other additional works. Without the Talmud one cannot grasp the true meaning of the Torah.

<sup>2</sup>Gurit Kadman, The New Israeli Folk Dances, Israeli Dance Festival pamphlet, p.13-14, Summer, 1968.

## 1.24 RECOMMENDED READINGS AND RESOURCES

### Articles in Magazines:

Eshel, Ruth. "Dance costume design in Israel" Israel Dance. Tel Aviv. Volume Number 11 (August 1997): p. 79-83. Ill.

Manor, Gloria. "And how is Israeli dance feeling today?" Israel dance. Tel-Aviv. Volume Number 12 (winter 1998): p. 96-99. Ill.

"To dance with the times: the Arab-Israeli conflict as it appears in Israeli dance." Israel Dance. Tel-Aviv. Volume Number 10 (March 1997): p. 74-79. Ill.

### Books:

Berk, Fred. The Chasidic Dance. New York: American Zionist Youth Foundation, 1975.

Berrol, Cynthia F. Israel Dance/Movement and the Creative Arts Therapies in Special Education. New York: World Rehabilitation Fund Inc., International Exchange of Experts and Information in Rehabilitation, 1987.

Chochem, Corinne. Palestine Dances: Folk Dances of Palestine. Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1978, c1941.

Eshkol, Noa. Debka: Arab and Israeli Folk Dance. Holon, Israel: Movement Notation Society, c1974.

Eshkol, Noa. In the Steps of the Hora. Holon, Israel: Movement Notation Society, 1986.

Shoshani, Michal. Folk Dances of Israel: 1. Women's Dances from the Yemen, 2. Israeli Folk Dances. Tel-Aviv: Israeli Music Institute, c1970.