

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

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Recreational Israeli dance as a modern participatory art form:  
a computer-aided study of *rikudai-am yisraeli*, 1987

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Master of Arts in Dance

by

Edith Lilian Greenblatt

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forms by the same process. The innermost circle is associated with better dancers. Those who dance in the center are supposed to be accomplished at that particular dance and at RID in general.

When *markidim* teach and lead dances, they do so from the center. Dancers associate the center with dance movement leadership and often look there for guidance when they are unsure of the steps. This

START

the innermost circle is assumed to be beginners and others who are learning a dance outside of the outermost circle.

Couple dances in sample D all begin in two concentric circles formed by male/female pairs of dancers. The women begin standing along the outermost circle with the men standing immediately next to them collectively forming a second, inner circle. (Dancers usually perceive this arrangement as a single circle of couples as opposed to a double circle of paired individuals.) During each of the dances in sample D, the partners change orientation along their respective circles at least once. Most often, the women and men temporarily exchange respective circles. Quite often, the movements performed in these exchanged positions are identical or mirrored repetitions of movements which were done immediately prior in the original positions. In general, all dances in sample C and related subsamples were done along either single or concentric circles.

### Connections

STOP

This section discusses the connections between the movements of the dancers as well as the orientation and coordination of their movements.

# START

## Connection between dancers

In circle dances the most common connection between dancers is holding hands with the dancers immediately adjacent on either side. Hands are held down at arms length (see Labanotation in appendix 13 and photos in appendix 9). Dancers in sample J appear to hold hands when doing circle dances which use movements requiring rapid directional changes which are less than 180 degrees (unless the movement is physically impossible to do without releasing hands). Shoulder holds (in which dancers place their opened palms on the nearest shoulder of each adjacent dancer) occurred infrequently in sample J. In sample D a shoulder hold appeared periodically during the dancing of *K'shenavo* (position 18) at only some of the documented events. None of the remaining twenty-two dances in sample D utilized a shoulder hold. During all other movements in circle dances, dancers show a great preference for dancing unattached.

In sample J couple dances, dancers frequently change connections during the dance. Positions include holding the closest opposite hand, or same hand (right to right or vice versa), holding both opposite hands, *varsouvianna* position, ballroom position and dancing unattached. In sample D, dancers spent more time in some fashion attached to their partners than unattached. It appears that a differentiating feature between couple and circle dances is that dancers spend significantly more measures touching their partners in couple dances than they do touching their neighbors in circle dances. The connection between dancers appears to be

related to the distances between dancers at any given time. (See appendix 9.)

#### Distance between dancers

Dancers are not always evenly spaced along the circles but in areas where there are noticeable "groups" in any given circle, the distance between dancers is quite consistent. (This bunching of dancers creates visible breaks in the circle and thus defines both intentional and unintentional line leaders.) The distance between dancers on the inside circle(s) is usually a bit greater than the distance between those on the outer or "main circle." An exact study of the distance between dancers was not possible but approximations made on sample J indicate that circle dancers along the main circle seem to dance closer to each other than necessary (that is, if the room permits more space for dancers, they won't use it). They seem to prefer to move into concentric circles. The "main" or outside circle is always more crowded than the inner circle. (The dancers' movements may be larger as a result but this feature was not examined in this study.)

In circle dances, dancers stay about one half to one meter apart from each other (measured at shoulder level). This distance range is maintained when changing direction but necessarily decreased when going in toward center. (The circumference of the circle decreases while width of the dancers remains the same.) This distance is maintained when dancers hold hands as well as when they dance unattached. In couple dances the range of distances is greater — the distance between partners standing side to side is less than in circle dances — approximately between less than one

tenth and three quarters of a meter apart. Face to face they maintain distances as little as one tenth of one meter and as great as two meters or more. This seems to indicate that a greater shifting of orientation distances between dancers is a feature of couple dances which contrasts with circle dances. The distance between a couple and its neighbor is usually greater than or equal to the standard circle dance distance.

Orientation of dancers

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In sample G, circle dances were lined separately. In the circle dances, dancers oriented themselves to the adjacent dancers in three ways: front to back, side by side, or rotating so that orientation to other dances was constantly in flux. All circle dances used at least two of these orientations and most used all three. Couple dances were evaluated by orientation to one's partner. Dancers used three primary orientations in relation to each other. These were side by side, rotating alone and standing face to face. Sample G couple dances did not use any front to back orientations. All dances changed orientations at least twice during a dance. Most dances changed more often. It appears that older dances (c1975 and earlier) change orientation less often. Rotations usually occur in increments of forty-five degrees. Most RID rotations are 45, 90, 135, 180, 270, or 360 degrees. Accomplished dancers will sometimes add additional 360 degree turns if the time permits. Frequent rotation and direction changes appear to be a prominent feature of RID.

Coordination between dancers

In sample B, all RID circle dances feature only unison movement. RID couple dances in sample D featured unison, parallel and mirror image

movement most frequently. The only exception to this occurs when the women turn and the men do not. On these occasions, the men and women necessarily do directionally unrelated steps. However, even then, the movements are almost always rhythmically identical and the couple is more often than not physically attached, and progressing the same direction along the circle. Although men and women may do slightly different movements, each couple performs the same movements as the other couples. One might say then that each couple participates in unison movement during a given couple dance. Improvisation is not a distinguishing feature of RID. It is clear that in recreational Israeli dances, dancers either participate in unison dancing as individuals in circle dances or as members of male/female pairs in couple dances. (See photographs in appendix 9.)

#### Paths

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personal paths

#### Dance path

While c circles, RID dancers  
use primarily f aths. Dancers either  
progress along the circle clockwise (CW), counterclockwise (CCW) or they  
move almost directly in toward or away from the center of the circle along  
an unspecified radius. Some movements are done in place as well. In  
samples F and F' these five components were examined for net  
gain/measure-unit. RID dances in sample F each ended with a net gain  
counterclockwise. More specifically, dances in sample F' showed a primary

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