

From TANGO to HIP-HOP

Every July, performers and visitors from around the world descend on the central Galilee city of Karmiel for a three-day non-stop celebration of dance. Whether it's Israeli or international folk dancing, contemporary dance, modern dance, hip-hop or dabka, chances are that you can find it in Karmiel / Liza Rosenberg



The Karmiel Dance Festival is unique in the world in that it is open to all dance styles," says its General Director Aharon Solomon. "Most dance festivals focus on only one style, whereas our festival strives to incorporate as many different styles as we can," he adds. Solomon definitely knows what he's talking about – he's been the festival's general director since its inception.

The first dance festival was held in 1988 to mark the 40th anniversary of Israel's independence. "We wanted to see how successful it would be and then decide whether to continue," recalls Solomon. That first festival was, in fact, a success, and has since been held every year, growing over time to include greater numbers of both participants and visitors. This year's festival, to be held July 12th-14th, will have more than 5,000 participants and approximately 250,000 visitors from Israel and around the world.

From the whole world

"Every year, important dance troupes come from all over the world to participate in the festival," notes



Solomon. In past years, the Karmiel Dance Festival has played host to ballet companies from China and Korea as well as Russia's Bolshoi Ballet. This year's international acts include Korean Buddhist monks from the Taego order presenting the elaborate Nirvana dance performance, Argentinean troupe Tango Seduction and the Tap Storytellers from Barcelona, Spain, to name just a few. Also in attendance will be dance companies from Turkey, Romania, Georgia, Canada and the United States.

The performances given by the Korean Buddhist monks and Tango Seduction are certain to be among the highlights of this year's festival. The Korean troupe – which is sponsored by the Korean government – includes more than 80 dancers, musicians and Kodo drummers, combining Buddhist rituals with traditional instruments and creating a perfect synergy of artistic heritage in harmony with music and dance – in other words, Nirvana. At its essence, the show is a cultural, artistic program that focuses on world peace – an important legacy of Buddhist culture that is passed from generation to generation.

One of the primary components of the monks' per-



formance is acknowledgement of the liberation of the individual – from rebirth to new life in paradise, i.e. death. And of course instruments used by the monks for these special Buddhist rituals are authentic. It's also worth noting that all the dancers are university graduates who studied dance. Being members of this very unique troupe allows them to combine their religious beliefs with their love of dance.

If you're looking to get your pulse racing, *Tango Seduccion* may be just the act to make your heart skip a beat. This Buenos Aires-based troupe comes to the Karmiel Dance Festival to perform its tantalizing "Temptations of the Tango," in an updated version created by Argentinean choreographer and dancer Gustavo Russo, known internationally as the "Baryshnikov of tango." Five musicians and 14 dancers led by Russo and his partner Samantha bring the plot of this show to life, expressing the beauty of the intimate dialogue through dance. This special performance showcases the history of the tango from the classic drama of Carlos Gardel to the passionate contemporary jazz of Astor Piazzolla, and is set in the bars, port and streets of the magical city of Buenos Aires.

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Showcasing local talent

In addition to the acts coming from abroad, there will be many performances given by Israeli troupes as well. According to Solomon, very few Israeli performers have not yet participated in some aspect of the festival. "Music is incorporated into the dance performances," he says, "and most of Israel's professional musicians choose to be involved." Over the years, all of Israel's major professional dance companies have performed at one time or another, including Ohad Naharin's Batsheva Dance company, Kibbutzit – the Kibbutz Contemporary Dance Company and the now defunct Bat Dor Dance Company.

It should come as no surprise to anyone that Israel has such a thriving – not to mention diverse – dance scene, and this year's Karmiel Dance Festival features many of the best dance companies that Israel has to offer. From the Vertigo Dance Company's premiere of its new show "Null" to three different works performed by the Israel Ballet; from Compas – the Israeli Flamenco Dance Company to The Project – Contemporary Dance Repertoire, it's clear that the world of Israeli dance is a very exciting place to be.



Other Israeli shows at the festival include performances by amateur dance groups from around the country and a competition for choreographers creating new dances using songs written by the late Yair Rosenblum, as well as jazz, folkdance and other competitions.

For an event that promises to be 100% memorable, be sure to check out 100% Art, a performance given by a troupe that includes dancers with disabilities and special needs. And, if you're looking for an act the kids will enjoy, be sure not to miss the performance by Zvuva Zamzoomoova – dance theater for the whole family.

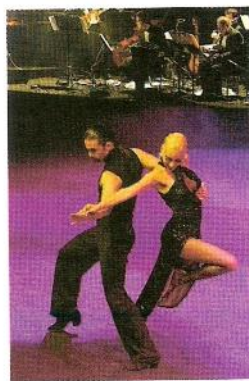
Non-stop fun

Sleeping is an optional activity at the Karmiel Dance Festival, where the party continues all night long. With more than 100 different events planned, you can rest assured that there won't be any dull moments. In addition to the numerous dance performances, within the confines of the designated festival grounds (referred to locally as Kiryat Hafestival), visitors can attend a giant fair, enjoy the talents of a diverse array of street performers, sample the culinary delicacies being served up at the food stalls, view a variety of exhibitions and more. For the youngsters, there's a youth activities complex and playground equipment, and there's even a swimming pool open around the clock for whenever you feel the need to cool off.

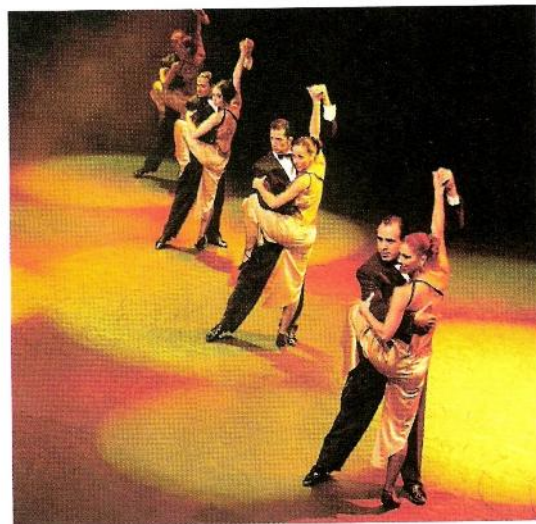
And then, of course, there's dancing. According to Solomon, this dance festival is also unique in that no other festivals of this kind offer so many opportunities for visitor participation. It is possible, quite literally, to dance for three straight days. With a variety of themed dance parties that include hip-hop, salsa, zumba and more, there's sure to be a beat that will have your toes tapping. If a change of pace is what you need, why not join the scheduled public sing-a-long with Israeli singer Dorit Reuveni?

If you do feel the need to sleep while visiting the festival, several options are available. If you aren't fortunate enough to have friends or relatives in the area, it's possible to rent rooms in private homes throughout the city of Karmiel as well as in B&Bs and other accommodations in the vicinity. If, however, you don't mind roughing it a bit, grab your tents and sleeping bags

THE PERFORMANCES GIVEN BY THE KOREAN BUDDHIST MONKS AND TANGO SEDUCCION ARE CERTAIN TO BE AMONG THE HIGHLIGHTS OF THIS YEAR'S FESTIVAL



For additional information about the Karmiel Dance Festival, including ticket purchases and sleeping arrangements, go to www.karmiefestival.co.il.



– there's a designated area of the festival grounds that also contains restroom and shower facilities.

Behind the scenes

Not surprisingly, an event of this scale requires a great deal of planning and preparation. The Karmiel Dance Festival takes approximately one year to plan, and after it wraps up each year, festival employees take a quick break and then come back to begin planning the next one. "International acts must be invited before the end of the year in order to ensure that the festival fits into the act's cultural program for the following year," notes Solomon. "In some cases, acts must be invited up to two years in advance," he adds. Next year's festival – celebrating 25 years since its inception – promises to be especially exciting, and planning is already underway.

In order to maintain its success, festival organizers must remain alert. They are constantly on the lookout for new acts to invite and keep a close watch on developing artistic trends. Organizers are also always looking for ways to draw greater numbers of visitors, especially youth. Ensuring that everything runs smoothly and according to plan is obviously a concern as well. And, while no performers have ever cancelled their participation in the festival due to either political or security reasons, the festival did have to be rescheduled in 2006 due to the Second Lebanon War that summer, instead taking place in October during the intermediate days of Sukkot.

Solomon wants people to know that the festival isn't limited only to the events in Karmiel, and that many of the international acts being brought to Israel for the festival offer a series of performances throughout the country. The Buddhist monks from Korea will be performing in Jerusalem, Herzliya and Tel Aviv. Tango Seduccion has several shows scheduled, heading as far south as Beersheva and as far north as Haifa, and including such locales as Kibbutz Gan Shmuel. Fragmento, a tap dance performance from Barcelona, will be touring the country as well, along with special guest Harel Skaat, a popular Israeli singer.

"For those people who either can't make the trip to Karmiel or don't manage to purchase tickets, we will bring the festival to them," says Solomon – a man who clearly enjoys his role as general director of one of Israel's biggest cultural festivals. ●