



# Gurit Kadman: The Diaghilev of Israeli Folk Dance

by Judith Brin Ingher

**When the British Mandate authorities imposed night curfews in 1947, no one was allowed on the roads of Palestine from sunset to sunrise.** Nevertheless, Gurit Kadman organized a kibbutz festival at Daliah in the Ephraim Mountains and 25,000 people came. Knowing that they would not be able to leave in the dark, she programmed the dances for the whole night. The audience sat for the entire twelve hours as if mesmerized.

Kadman was not surprised. Dance had always been a part of Jewish life. In ancient Israel, even kings danced: in victory, in prayer and in mourning. Dance was integral to holidays and was lovingly described in many chapters of the Old Testament.

Dance also functioned importantly in the communities of the Diaspora during the thousands of years that Jews lived outside the land. As Jews began to return and settle, there was an urgency to recreate an Israeli culture. Kadman commented: "For us people who fervently wished to have dances of our own and in our life-time, it was clear that we had no choice. We created our own dances, and we burned with exhilaration when we witnessed them — our youth performing in a landscape at once ancient and new."

Cover of Palestine folk dance series on "Mayim, Mayim" edited by Gurit Kadman.

The festival, the second Kadman had produced in Daliah, was held in an amphitheater scooped out of the hillside for the occasion by the tractors of the kibbutz. The seats were bales of hay. "I was in great fear during the performance," Kadman recalls, "thinking of a sniper sneaking into the valley and shooting at all those thousands of spectators. But nothing happened. We were without gunshots in the area from five in the evening till five in the morning. Only some scorpions crawled from beneath the stones." There was no intermission. Kamna was given a note before the performance outlining the kibbutz director's fears of a landslide if large groups of the audience left their seats.

"What did happen I cannot explain. That audience held out for twelve hours, eating, sleeping, watching Israeli dance. Except for the Druze and Arab performances, in themselves remarkable as the British were supposedly keeping the fighting Jews and Arabs apart, all the dances and song were newly created in the three years since the first Daliah. I don't say that even half were good, but that's not important — those years were really years of creation."