

Covering letter from Paul Jackson:

2 Sept 2008

Dear Chair of LUTSF,

Please find enclosed two copies of my report and a CD-R from my visit to Israel to continue my research for my forthcoming biography of Robert Cohan. I am very grateful that my project has been supported by the Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship Fund, of which Bob is a patron. Without this support it would have been impossible to travel.

The visit, of two weeks, was very successful - see report - and I feel timely, as many of the 'characters' in the action are of advanced years. I managed to see all of the people I intended and they in turn provided me with information about other figures I did not know about, and I either saw them while there or have been in touch since. A particular highlight of the visit was the finding of a recording of an early work of Bob's that he thought was long since lost.

The founding of contemporary dance in Israel and the UK is not that different, with wealthy patrons - Robin Howard here and Bathseva de Rothschild there - providing the impetus on the wave of a love of all things Martha Graham. Cohan joins the two countries together in an artistic and personal sense and the warmth of feeling towards him in Israel is more than similar to that found in this country.

I had intended to go in April but the illness of a colleague forced me to put that on hold, this was unfortunate as I ended up going in July when the heat and humidity is, quite frankly, beyond an Englishman's endurance. However, the visit was enormously successful and has further helped to shape the form of the book.

Should anyone read this on the LUTSF website and have any information on Cohan, I would be grateful if they would contact me.

Many thanks to all,

Yours

Paul RW Jackson

Report for The Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship Travelling Fund
Paul RW Jackson
The Life and Work of Robert Cohan
Research Visit to Israel
July 2008

I am currently working on the first biography/study of the life and work of Robert Cohan. Cohan a star dancer with Martha Graham, was brought to England in 1967 by Robin Howard, to become the founding Artistic Director of the [Contemporary Dance Trust](#) in London and as such was the first Artistic Director of [The Place, London Contemporary Dance School](#) and [London Contemporary Dance Theatre](#), which he directed for the more than 20 years. To this day he serves on The Place's Board of Directors.

Without Robert Cohan dance as we know it in Britain would not be the same. He showed that there was a viable alternative to ballet, and to the Modern Educational Dance that was being taught in schools and colleges at the time - pace Lisa! This period is so beautifully covered in Valerie Preston Dunlop's film from 2003 entitled *The American Invasion 1962-1972*. One of the world's great teachers, Cohan developed Graham's methods to accommodate British bodies and attitudes. And not just British, because the London Contemporary Dance School at the Place became a mecca for students from around the world.

He was instrumental in the development of a vast following, not only for the repertory of London Contemporary Dance Theatre in the 70s and 80s but through his pioneering residencies throughout the country, which laid the ground work for the all other British companies that have grown up in the last thirty years. Without Cohan there would be no, Richard Alston, Siobhan Davies, Lloyd Newson, Rosemary Butcher, Dharshan Singh-Bhuller, Anthony van Laast, the list could go on and include choreographers and dancers in every part of the world.

As well as the work in the UK, Cohan was closely involved with dance in Israel, working with the Bat Sheva Dance Company and later Bat Dor Company, and from 1980 to 1990 he combined his British work with that of Artistic Advisor to the Batsheva Dance Co. This area of his work is largely unknown outside of Israel and even there is being forgotten. It was to document this that thanks to the Fund I went to Israel at the beginning of July.

First though I would like to advise anyone not used to extremes of heat and humidity not to go to Israel in July, it is debilitating if you have anything to do other than stay still! However, once I got over the heat I had a fascinating and rewarding time. I have realised over the years that the dance world is one large extended family and contacts I had made elsewhere opened doors for me there. I was very fortunate to meet the doyennes of the Israeli dance world, Rena Gluck and Rina Schenfeld, both stars of the Bat Sheva Company and Schenfeld at the age of 70, still performing. Both had been coached in solo roles by Martha Graham and had been in the first performance of Bat Sheva in 1965 which had included two works by Cohan. One work *Celebration*, has never been staged anywhere else and it was fascinating to see photographs of and hear memories of the work, Rena Gluck even demonstrated to me some of the material which had stuck in her mind for nearly 50 yrs. Both Gluck and Schenfeld are living archives of the Bat Sheva Company, which is fortunate, since, as at the Place, there is from the current management no interest or physical evidence of the company's history. Of particular interest was finding in Rena Schenfeld's collection a film of Cohan and Schenfeld dancing in Cohan's work *The Pass*, this is one of his earliest works and no other record of it exists, it is also the only example of Cohan dancing in his own choreography, a real find!

Mira Edels who worked closely with Cohan during the 1980's was a fund of information about the artistic and political climate of

Bat Sheva at this time, and it will be fascinating to compare Cohan's work there with his work at LCDT. The politics of dance in the two countries is not so dissimilar! Moshe Romano who was rehearsal director of LCDT for 15 years gave me a great deal of information about that institution and also of Bat Sheva of which he was a founder member and later artistic director under Cohan.

Yair Vardi, well known in England as a star dancer of Rambert and now the Director of the Suzanne Delall Centre in Tel Aviv, the major dance centre in Israel, which was founded by Cohan, was very useful in his comments on Cohan's place in the development of Israeli dance.

Many other people – Paul Bloom, Yehudit Arnon, Elida Gera, Danni Karavan, etc- contributed information all of which adds to the bigger picture of what is an extraordinary life, but, you will have to wait for the book to see how all of the material comes together.

In addition to the specifics of researching Cohan what was so interesting for my self as an academic and historian was to see the dance world in Israel. I was fortunate to be there at a time of an exceptional dance festival and so able to see many of the new and upcoming choreographers as well as the work of Bat Sheva, in an extraordinary installation at Tel Aviv Port. It was exciting to see the final year performances at the Jerusalem Academy, and to sit in on auditions at that institution and to talk to staff and students.

Unexpected contact with two Fulbright scholars provided some further avenues for research, for which I am very grateful. And, I never thought I would understand Eshkol-Wachman notation, but now I do!

Paul RW Jackson