

Rina Nikova



This is a photograph of my friend, Rina Nikova, taken in 1949, in Jerusalem.

Rina was of Russian origin, she had lived in Jerusalem for quite some time when I met her during World War II, and had a ballet studio on King George Avenue, on the fifth floor of an important building, which was known as 'Beit Hamaalot' ['staircase' in Hebrew]. Arkadie Kugel, a Russian pianist and composer, who had been her collaborator for many years, was about to leave her, for he was going to teach, if I am not mistaken, at the Beirut conservatory. In order to find a replacement for him, Rina was auditioning various pianists in those days, whom she invited - for a

fee, of course - to collaborate at her ballet classes. My fee, and of course, I accepted what was offered me, without bargaining, was 300 mils an hour. If we take into consideration the fact that a meal at 'Palestine Restaurant' or at 'Mitbah Hapoalim' cost 100 mils, just as much as an 'expensive' film ticket in the evening, or that a falafel cost 10 mils, as well as the fact that, from the very beginning, I had at least two to three sessions of several hours every week, I think I don't have to explain the material and moral impact that this 'first job' had upon me.

Married to an intellectual who was on the front, Rina had no living relatives, her only family being the ballet school. The 'school' consisted of two adjoining rooms inside her apartment, which was actually a three-room apartment. The front door of the apartment opened on a hallway. The latter had several doors. The first door to the right opened into a bedroom. Two doors on the left permitted access to the bathroom and the kitchen, respectively. The door at the end of the hallway opened into a large room which was a sort of parlor, with a cottage piano on the wall ahead, and a few chairs placed around a table on the right. To the left of the piano was a second room, which represented the 'studio'. Since the space was so little, the groups of pupils were also limited to a maximum of six to eight children.

Rina Nikova, who was then around 45 years old, was known as a 'peak' of the Israeli ballet school. An expert in classical ballet, she had started working on the rediscovery of the Jewish traditional dances even before the war, analyzing and modernizing the ancient Hebrew dance. She had formed a team of dancers and kept several groups of classical dance simultaneously, made up of paying pupils, who took weekly ballet lessons. The groups were organized according to age, and the degree of mastery of classical ballet: there were beginners, advanced, and even professional dancers, such as Rachel, Zuria, and the only male dancer of the troupe at that time, named Beny. Rina worked with all these pupils from morning until the evening, basically. She wasn't a materialistic person at all, I believe she didn't even charge some of her pupils.'