Highlights of Anna Halprin’s Recent Trip to Israel

This trip was the last part of Anna’s trilogy “Remembering Lawrence,” honoring her late husband. It paid tribute to his deep connection to Israel, where he helped found Kibbutz Ein-Hashofet, served on Mayor Teddy Kollek’s Jerusalem Committee, and designed such landmarks as the Goldman Promenade (where the peace walk shown here took place).
Singing and playing music, Jewish, Muslim, Druze, and Christian women greeted Anna before a peace walk organized by Elana Rozenman, executive director of TRUST-Emun (trust-emun.org), a group committed to building mutual understanding. “We believe that each person who builds peace in their heart contributes to peace in our land,” Elana explained.
More than 100 women came from all over Israel, from settlements, kibbutzim, and Arab villages, to walk together in peace along the seam between East and West Jerusalem, on the Goldman Promenade. After voicing her despair from all the deaths during the summer, a Muslim woman indicated that this walk “is the way women overcome the war.”
Anna led the walk, accompanied by Susie Gelman (on left), whose father (Richard Goldman) was a major funder of the promenade, and Ibtisam Mahameed, founder of a women’s center in northern Israel. The women walked slowly in silence. An Israeli reporter noted, “This was so different from many peace events—so quiet and heartfelt.”
At both the beginning and the end of the walk, Anna led the group in a celebratory dance. Among those present was a woman from Daliyat al-Karmel, the Druze village that taught so much about farming and how to survive on the land to the young Larry Halprin and his fellow founders of the neighboring Kibbutz Ein-Hashofet.
From Jerusalem Anna headed to teach a workshop at Moa Oasis, an ecological retreat in the desert in southern Israel, along the ancient spice trading route. Organized by Michal Israelstam, Liat Ishay, and Ronit Levin of Soli Sola, the workshop brought together participants from many different backgrounds.
The 80-some participants came not only from Israel but also from Russia, Ukraine, Poland, Hungary, Australia, Japan, and many other countries. Tamalpa Institute (tamalpa.org) provided scholarships for two Palestinian students, and a number of the other participants were actively involved in peace work.
“Dance is the mother of all art,” Anna told the participants. Using the Tamalpa Life/Art Process, she showed how “as we tap into the deep sources of bodily wisdom through creative art expression, we dance the renewal, re-creation, and healing of ourselves and our world.”
Central to her teaching was Lawrence Halprin’s RSVP cycles, with participants gathering Resources through the Performance of various Scores, such as this exploration of active and passive roles. Valuactions allowed partners to share their experiences—the physical sensations, the emotions, the thoughts and images.
Often after a movement exploration participants translated their experience into a “self-portrait,” sometimes augmenting the image with poetic words. At the end of the workshop participants covered the floor with their self-portraits, tracing their transformation during their five days with Anna.
A student from Ramallah later wrote, “Through every exercise Anna gave I felt something amazing. This feeling made me connect all the exercises with the reality that I live in…. I learned a new method which will be very helpful to my dancing community work.”
One workshop participant, artist Ruth Katz Klein (second from right, in all-white), created a special peace dove, outlined with white stones in the sand. Led in a procession by Anna, people began to fill in the bird, making a wish for peace as they placed their stones on the ground. After this ritual a spontaneous dance of joy took over.
Throughout the workshop Anna was assisted by Iris Nais (left) and Tomoko Hiraoka (right), while Sue Heinemann wrote Anna’s instructions on a flip chart, so that participants could copy them later.
The workshop ended with Anna’s Planetary Dance, a dance for peace among peoples and peace with the Earth (planetarydance.org). Musician Yogev Haruvi (center) drummed as participants declared their personal call for peace, ran to the beat until they could run no more, and then gathered in the center, pulsing and singing in unison.
Anna then traveled to a kibbutz in the valley where David fought Goliath to work with the Vertigo Dance Company, a highly regarded troupe founded by Adi Sha'al (left) and Noa Wertheim (right). Their studio is in an Eco-Art Village conceived as “a place of harmony among artistic expression, social responsibility and sustainability” (vertigo.org.il).

(All photos of Vertigo by Maayan Hotam; courtesy Vertigo Dance Company.)
In less than five days Anna introduced the dancers to Larry’s RSVP process of collective creativity while working on an Israeli version of her landmark piece “Parades and Changes.” “Rather than imposing an American aesthetic, I want to evolve a dance that is meaningful both to the performers and to an Israeli audience,” she said.
From 10 to 7 each day Anna, Noa, musical director Miguel Frasconi (a colleague of composer Morton Subotnick), and the dancers collaborated on this new version of “Parades and Changes,” culminating in two performances. “What gets renewed every time is our ability to express our humanity through the language of dance and art,” Anna noted.
Each dancer introduced him- or herself by name and a movement. One dancer stated, “I hate, I hate, I hate to say my name,” and then articulated it clearly, without stuttering as he had feared. All the dancers commented on how difficult it was to make these very personal introductions, yet how they learned surprising new things about each other.
A big challenge for Anna was the Dressing and Undressing score. Nudity, although central to the original piece, did not seem appropriate in this situation, where it would convey disregard for religious beliefs. Instead, the dancers communicated the sacredness of this everyday ritual through their slow movement, adopting sculptural poses before dressing again.
The Paper Dance, as always, was a highpoint of the performance, emotional for both the dancers and the audience.
In Israel the Shooting/Falling score carried special resonance. For some it brought up their service in the army. Each dancer found his or her own way to fall. “It was wonderful that you always wanted to hear our thoughts and experiences, and really wanted to create this piece with us, so that it reflected each of our different personalities,” one dancer later said.
For the Vertigo performance Anna played her harmonica to call the fallen dancers into the Embrace score. This role, which grew out of the rehearsal process, exemplified the generative power of Larry’s RSVP process. When Anna started working with Vertigo, she had no idea that she would end up performing!
Throughout the process, the dancers opened themselves up to Anna's teachings. "Because the workshop was dealing with emotions and internalizing, I felt I was letting all my emotions out, and I was crying so much!" one dancer wrote. "This workshop allowed me to discover new sides of myself and changed me as a performer (and perhaps a person)."
The Stomp score provided a release and a sense of re-energizing for both the dancers and the audience. Miguel spent extra time working with the dancers on the complex rhythms of this score, but it was amazing how quickly they learned it and made it their own.
The piece ended with a Planetary Dance. Anna declared: “I dance for children everywhere, that they may be safe, protected, and loved” (one of many calls for peace sent from around the world). The dancers added their intentions, and children from the kibbutz, along with a mother carrying her baby, joined the celebratory run. The audience cheered.
One young boy was so moved by it all he couldn’t stop crying. In a group letter Noa, Adi, and the dancers thanked Anna for “the opportunity to further explore ourselves through such a meaningful process.” In turn Anna was grateful for the generosity and supportiveness of Noa and everyone at Vertigo in helping her realize this tribute to Larry.
Anna gave two final workshops in Israel—one for dance therapists and the other for students and faculty at the Jerusalem Academy of Music and Dance. Both were filled to capacity, with over 80 in each. At the Jerusalem Academy the students were impressed with how Anna used anatomical knowledge as a creative tool.
After movement explorations like this, Anna concluded her last workshop in Israel with another Planetary Dance, calling for peace. The next day Vered Aviv, head of the Academy's Masters program in dance, wrote: “I couldn’t teach my classes today because the students were so excited and moved by your workshop that they had to talk and discuss it deeply and in detail.”
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