



New Jerusalem Dancers

Let them praise His name

Summer 2005

So what is Messianic Dance? Is it Davidic or Israeli? What is the difference?

I am certain that there are many who have been involved for years that have their own strong opinions. It is still the question I deal with more than any other. I would like to offer my opinion and give you a break down of all three based on my twenty years of experience.

My introduction in New York was to Jewish Dance Worship; some told me it was Liturgical or even Christian Dance Worship.

I had four years with the *Dancers of The New Jerusalem* who were a 'Jews for Jesus' affiliated group based in New York. We travelled with *Liberated Wailing Wall*, their music group and danced at Conference centres like the New Orleans Superdome and all over the USA (1985-1989) until my family moved to London. At that stage I had not heard of the phrase Davidic or Messianic Dance.

In 1993 and 1995 I attended a Messianic Conference in Pennsylvania and attended Davidic Dance classes. Many of the dances were Israeli adapted to the new Messianic music being played at the Conferences.

I love this music because the words are straight from scripture, not someones' feelings about their relationship with the LORD.

After the Conferences I referred to myself as a Davidic Dance Teacher. I explained that it was based on Israeli or Jewish Dance. I then regularly attended Israeli Dance classes and learned many more steps and the traditional names for those I had been teaching in Davidic Dance.

Since January 1985 I have considered myself part of the Messianic community but it wasn't until Erica Bebb approached me in 1994 to consider being joint coordinator with her of the Messianic Dance Network of the ICDF. (See above) that I even considered the words Messianic and dance together.

Christian Dance Fellowship

Coordinator of the ICDF
for Messianic Dance
Network



Erica and I spent hours on several occasions trying to unfold the meaning of Messianic versus Davidic. We had enormously different views, which I believed were due to seeing things from both the Jewish and Gentile understanding in the discussions.

I was so blessed by her maturity and I found the meetings very encouraging, that we could agree to disagree and still find an explanation.

Ten years later I am still dealing with the question regularly. This is how I deal with it today in its chronological format

Davidic (2 Samuel 6:14)

Generally this is the scripture used as a basis for the first Biblical celebratory dance (*Macholat*). Actually, the first is the dance of joy after the Red Sea crossing (Exodus 15:20) led by Miriam, the elder sister of 80-year-old Moses, on Timbrel.

Therefore to me Davidic Dance is the first Hebraic style dance worship to the G-d of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob by His chosen people Israel.

It is a term widely used by the Messianic Congregations and is the one I prefer.

Israeli (Psalm 148:3)

The next term used today is Israeli, also referred to as Hebraic or Jewish. Any of the scriptures found on page 8 of this letter would support the Biblical Israelites worshipping G-d in Dance. Other forms of Israeli or Israeli Folk Dance, according to the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* can be traced back to Moldavia and Eastern Europe where a woman began teaching in the courtyards of the synagogues after the *Shabbat* meetings.

There is no record of it being used as worship. Therefore, it may have been of a social nature. I however, have difficulty believing that dance by those attending a synagogue can be secular considering the Biblical history of dance as worship.

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I have discovered from ' survivors' that I met in Sobrathegy Hungary, that on *Simchat Torah* (rejoice over *Torah*) they danced with rocks on their shoulders because they had no access to the *Torah* Scrolls. This shows us that dance worship does not depend on personal circumstances but is a command to be observed whenever possible.

In 1993/4 I was teaching weekly Davidic/Israeli class in a Liberal Synagogue in London. To me it was worship but I do not believe even one of the 20 or so participants saw it as anything other than a fun night out, not even the Rabbi!! They ' let me go' when they found out I was '*Messianic*' even though I had not proselytised. I prefer to be friends and deal with their questions as they come, which they did.

I find the Israeli system of dance to be inefficient. There are thousands of songs and each one has its' own dance. In regular weekly workshops the steps are not often taught, as the music is played, you are , , expected to know them. The newer ones will get taught but I have seen some sit out of most of the dances that they did not know. It can be complicated for a beginner.

I prefer the interchangeable dance system; see the back page to order a paper on this.

Messianic (Isaiah 53)

So where did the phrase ' Messianic Dance' come from?

I have to tell you that in my life it came from my association with Erica Bebb! My initial understanding from her was that any dance style was acceptable as long as it pointed to Messiah *Yeshua*. I arrogantly thought that the word Messianic was mine not hers!! The style had to be part of my movement, that is, Jewish.

We had wonderful creative brainstorming sessions about it, resulting in fact in many uplifting exciting presentations together. We were after all joint co-ordinators of the Messianic Dance Network and I have no problem with it being called that.

I feel that Messianic Dance must have a strong message pointing to the Messiah not just a dance that worships G-d. We, N.J.D. have a dance called *Isaiah 53*, which is a beautiful song by Liberated Wailing Wall. It obviously speaks of *Yeshua*. Neither the music which is a waltz nor my choreography are Hebraic, but to me it is a perfect example of a Messianic dance. It is available on a compilation video with other dances. I prefer there to be something Jewish in Messianic Dance. Since our *Isaiah 53* dance is based on the Jewish *Tenakh*, it has that.

Therefore, the term Messianic Dance does have some creative license but needs a strong Biblical base pointing to the Messiah.

Why do I prefer the phrase Davidic Dance? I am an emotional and flamboyant dancer so the idea of David dancing before the LORD "with all his might" appeals to me.

I trust this will help you to understand why there are so many descriptions. Choose yours.

Leadership

For over ten years now I have been training others to be leaders. I did not realise I was doing this until David and Sandy Levine of ' Hear O Israel Ministry' pointed it out to me during one of the early Festivals. I took my leadership position very seriously often ' rubbing people the wrong way' in order to accomplish difficult things. (For overseas readers, that means making others annoyed or upset!!)

I remember in Saint Petersburg in 1994 in one of the messages of Jonathan Bemis he likened me to a ' bull in a china shop' . In other words when I set out to accomplish something positive, nothing gets in my way, not even popularity! My persuasive character has been known to upset those I am working for even though they have to admit I am doing an effective job "with all my might." I have a somewhat overdeveloped sense of professionalism. I do not do things by half measures only full.

I respect a chain of command even in difficult circumstances. In Kiev I had taken thirteen N.J.D. members to a Festival, by invitation, to present our dances. Three were school age and we had sacrificed to pay their fares and taken them out of school for a week. They like us had rehearsed 8 to 10 hours a day but the stage manager had decided three of them would not dance in the Festival. Two were our sons Paul Stephen and Wilfred who had both prayed and accepted the Messiah *Yeshua* at five years old, as did our daughter Natasha who was allowed to dance. Her friend Josie Delap was not.

It was devastating for the whole group. We cried and prayed for an hour when I told them. It was as if our arms or legs were ripped off. The youngsters were good and deserved to dance. It was a tough call for me but I had to respect the stage managers decision and position. Some of N.J.D. did not agree with me. I gained the love and respect of that dear lady (another ' bull in a china shop') and we became great friends. A day or two later we were given the opportunity to change the dance and included all of the children for the rest of the Festival.

mother time in Israel in 1998 the leadership were distant and unapproachable. Other dancers grumbled and I suggested it was unbiblical and they should speak to the worship leaders so we could all discuss grievances and pray to restore unity. I had just met these dancers and they were afraid to do that. I was concerned about the lack of unity, which was causing a bad atmosphere, and I knew was not G-d's will.

I spoke to the leaders but got accused of actually causing the disunity and stirring up a situation that they were not prepared to deal with.

I could have brought in some of the unhappy dancers to back me up and prove that there was a problem (strength in numbers) but I feel that sometimes defending yourself makes things worse. The atmosphere did not improve and friends visiting me from another ' Feast noticed the oppression without me saying a word.

I remembered that in that very place Yeshua Himself was falsely accused and ' did not open His mouth Isaiah 53.

It hurt me so much and ruined my first trip to the Land I had yearned to visit for so long. Now I yearn for a return visit but not to that Conference!! Some of the dancers asked me to forgive them for not supporting me. They are still my friends. Another tough leadership decision for me but I felt it honoured the LORD.

In 2004 I taught at an amazing all Spanish Conference called "Boot Camp" sponsored by a wonderful Colombian lady I had met in Puerto Rico, called Yalilte Diaz of ' Dancing for theLORD' .

I do not remember ever being so blessed by love and the presence of the *Ruach ha Kodesh* (Holy Spirit). Yalilte spent the last day with me and took me to the Airport in Fort Lauderdale and told me that the worship leader did not like it when I led Davidic dances to the slower music in the evening services. In the Latin culture when the music is slow it's just you and G-d and each does their own thing. I loved watching them but it is not part of my culture to use floaty movements alone in a communal setting. We have lovely dances like Miseriu and my own Shabbat waltz. It was a blessing that Yalilte had no problem with me leading a circle (*Macho!*) but if she did I would have obeyed the chain of command if she had asked me to stop, which was what had happened in Israel. Yalilte allowed me to worship according to my culture and that is usually communal. It may have been a difficult leadership decision for her.

How important is Dance Worship to G-d?

How many of you who are involved in dance worship have heard this? "Could the dancers please go to their seats, we want to really worship now*!! I have heard it many times and it makes me furious!! Why is dance worship made out to be inferior to singing or music?

Show me a chapter and verse, which says that.

I believe it to be a throw back of the Anti-Semitism of Luther and the council of Trent of 1545. They decided that only preaching and music should survive the ' Reformation period' I wonder which Bible they were reading? This unbiblical decision put dance on the ' backburner'¹. Many churches even consider it sinful!! I am grateful for an American Missionary that attended all my classes in Barcelona who said, "a church that does not dance is not a church".

Ginny White of the Northern Messianic Dancers spoke of her journey to get to one of our Messianic Praise Days. She travelled on both A and B roads to get there and challenged us to "get dance worship off the B road and onto the A road in worship". It is our Biblical right. Once again see page 8 for Scripture references.

Teaching skills

Finally I have become concerned about the teaching skills of some in dance worship. I am often at conferences where many classes are offered simultaneously. I do not get much chance to attend other classes since I teach Davidic, Israeli, Messianic Tambourine, Fitness and give lectures on al.

Participants often travel far and at a great cost to feed on knowledge and worship. Should we be less professional for the LORD in the name of niceness? Unity is vital and inclusiveness is a blessing but if it is at the cost of giving or offering the best, the price is too high.

Be sure of gifting before you offer to teach or hire a teacher. Qualifications are not always enough. Anyone can scrape by and get a piece of paper. Knowing a dance does not mean a person knows how to teach it. Secular qualifications for a ministry job means nothing if the anointing of G-d is not there. I have seen dances offered as worship that have no spiritual content at all, it either belongs to G-d or not. There must be a spiritual content, something that lifts the participant to another level, which gives them something to take home with them. If it does not make you feel closer to the LORD, it is just a dance class, fun but empty. No eternal value. Life is too short and the need in these days too great to waste time.

Even more frustrating is a teacher who does not know the music or dance well enough and who cannot answer questions

like ' on which count is the step?' The answer I heard was ' just do it like this' !!

You should not teach if:

You do not know rhythm and counts.

You do not know the music inside out.

You are not ergonomically and spatially aware.

You do not have patience.

You think that there are bad dancers in your class.

You do not know the difference between to copy and to mirror.

You are perfect.

You cannot admit your faults and weaknesses.

At N.J.D.' s suggestion I am preparing a Teachers Training Conference' , which I will finalise as soon as there is enough interest.

I recently saw a Davidic Dance teaching book, which had good information and scriptures, but the dance instruction was more confusing than educational. If there are no counts (eg. 1-8) in front of the steps how can you know the timing for each step or ' ba'.

In some highly recommended videos I have seen the teacher face the camera!! How can you guarantee that the learner has the ability to turn the movements around? This is true too of a Tambourine video from a recognised school in Texas. The teacher also said to ' point your foot because its pretty!! WHAT ABOUT THE MEN!! I saw about 60 dynamic powerful young men along with same number of women in Puerto Rico playing Tambourine. Should they seek to be ' pretty?'

Think about whom your audience might be, you must cater to all ages and genders.

Before purchasing find out if the materials have been tested out by untrained dancers.

I am a classically trained dancer R.A.D. (Royal Academy of Dance) and I could not follow the dances of the book mentioned earlier, due to confusing instructions and no counts. I was not the only one.

In the 2001 joint Messianic newsletter Cathy Wright of Australia raised seven issues (see page*). I believe these are still relevant and I am keen to get the opinion of others. If you have comments or needs in these areas please email or contact me. If I do not receive questions I cannot give it the time required due to other responsibilities.