

# Israeli dance class sees growing interest



Instructor Eliana Babcock leads a group as they practice Israeli dances at Temple Beth Sholom of the East Valley in Chandler. (David Minton/Staff Photographer)

BY KEN SAIN, MANAGING EDITOR

Eiliana Babcock and Jason Hecht said American Jews became more interested in Israeli culture after the Oct. 7 terrorist attack in Israel.

That is one of the reasons they expanded their teaching of Israeli dancing.

“We’ve been doing intermediates, probably for the last year or two,” Hecht said. “We decided this time to do a beginners class, and we’re definitely going to do another one.”

Babcock said that the beginners class gives new people a chance to try it without the pressure of being in a class where everyone else already knows all the moves.

In this first beginners' class, she said they've had as many as two dozen people come out. Jews have a long history with dancing. Israeli dancing goes back more than 100 years.

Each dance is choreographed, and each has a specific meaning.

“They make it dedicated to the land, they dedicate it to a dance, to a person,” Hecht said. “There’s dances about trees, there’s dances about dates, there’s dances about the sprinkler system there in Israel.”

On Oct. 7, 2023, Hamas forces and other militant groups invaded the Gaza Envelope in the Southern District of Israel, killing people in 21 communities.

The death toll was 1,139 and about 250 Israeli civilians and soldiers were taken as hostages.

Hecht said he and Babcock remember that attack with their dancing. “We will dance again,” he said.

Babcock added, “I have a shirt that says, ‘We will dance again.’”

Hecht said he’s been dancing since he was 7 or 8 years old.

“And then I didn’t do it for a long time, and then I went to a summer camp and started doing it again.”

Israeli dance is popular among the Jewish population in larger cities, Babcock said.

“In L.A., every year right around Thanksgiving, they do a marathon,” Hecht said. “They get [about] 500 teenagers to adults. We did one here, we had about 25 people, and it was nice. We danced from like 6 in the evening to like 11 or 12.”

At a recent Monday night session at Tempe Beth Shalom of the East Valley, participants worked in a circle. They would rotate one way, then the next, dipping at points, holding their hands out at others.

Babcock and Hecht took turns calling out the proper moves.

As the first beginners' class was winding down, Babcock said she and Hecht had not decided when they would start the next one.

“March, April, it depends,” she said.

“We might combine it, maybe with a beginner and high beginner. Once people keep coming, the ones that we get, if they're interested, we get.”

She said that once they have their final beginners class they will survey the participants to see how they can improve for the next one.

There are hundreds of dances, and some of them are very complex.

“You're not going to learn these dances in one night, or ever four weeks,” Hecht said. “There was a camp that I went to in California, they taught a dance that has 17 parts. It literally took an entire weekend for us to learn this dance.”

For more information on Israeli Dancing classes: [tbsev.org](http://tbsev.org).