

BELEDI BEAT

A quarterly publication of Jawaahir Dance Company and The Cassandra School

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Cassandra's College

Cassandra is thrilled to announce that Cassandra's College is open for enrollment, offering unique opportunities for intensive study of special topics in Middle Eastern dance through a Special Session, Tuesday Topics, and Festival Forum. Created to expand and enhance students' knowledge and dance experience, many classes and workshops are being offered in topics that are important for dancers to learn but don't fall into the usual format of dance classes. Cassandra says, join us for higher education!

All classes and workshops will be held at Jawaahir Studios. Courses are appropriate for students of all levels, and include Undergraduate (0–2 years of Middle Eastern dance study), Graduate (2–5 years), and Professional (5+ years) courses.

The Special Session is now complete, but Tuesday Topics (September 25–December 11) includes ten workshops with Cassandra and guest artists which are designed to share the instructors' vast knowledge through topics including Musical Interpretation, Neo-Tribal Techniques, Latin-Arabic Fusion, and Balancing Techniques.

Then, come be inspired all week or at a few workshops during the Festival Forum from October 15–21. The second annual week-long Festival of Oriental Dance will include highly-acclaimed guest artists Faten Salama of Egypt, and Hadia, a Canadian Oriental and Flamenco dancer. Nicole LeCorgne will offer a class in music for dancers and drum workshops for drummers. Cassandra and other guests will also teach classes throughout the week.

Festival Forum includes four workshops each day, free lectures, three performances, and vendors — all with



Hadia

the express purpose of helping to improve your dance and performance skills. Whatever style you choose to perform, you'll benefit from these experienced professional teachers. Classes will include Veil Management, Shimmies and Vibrations, Drum Solo Choreography, Melaya Leff, Nubian Dance, Stylings of Raqia Hassan and Mahmoud Reda, Turkish Rom, Body Logic, and Tribal Fusion.

Performances during Festival Forum will include a Wednesday Open Stage night for you to perform, and Friday and Saturday evening performances featuring Faten Salama, Hadia, Cassandra, Jawaahir Dance Company, and other local and regional artists. The Saturday evening performance will be followed by a DJ dance party on the Studio Theater stage. Bring your favorite CD!

For full details, call 612-872-6050, visit www.jawaahir.org, or email us at cassandra@jawaahir.org.

A Dancer's Dancer

Hadia, an internationally acclaimed Oriental dancer, says that dancers are her favorite audience: "That's when all the stops come out and something magical happens." It's no surprise, then, that Hadia is known by those in the business as a *dancer's dancer*.

Growing up in Saskatchewan, Hadia danced because she loved it, but dance classes were not available. While in college, she enrolled in jazz and modern dance, but shortly afterward, she was invited to a belly dance class. She was so intrigued by the smooth, round quality of the movement that she promptly traded in her other classes.

After attending classes for two years, she attended a workshop by the legendary Badawia of Jordan, and became an instant belly dance addict. She traveled to pursue the best teachers in the world. She made frequent trips to California and Oregon to study, and during one such trip attended a workshop given by Ahmed Jarjour, a Lebanese Canadian dancer. Hadia's reality was transformed while she was imitating his "wonderful, luscious diagonal undulation" for 15 minutes: she had a "physical, emotional and even cellular experience." With her first taste of Egyptian Oriental dance, she became aware that she had been in a West Coast mentality. Fueled by her epiphany, she went to Montreal to study with Jarjour and Bobby Farrah in New York. With an insatiable desire to discover the roots of the beautiful music and dance, Hadia left for Turkey, Egypt, and North Africa to begin a lifelong journey.

The only dance classes in Egypt at the time were through the two national dance companies. The only way to study with most dancers at that time

was to go out and to watch them perform; Hadia absorbed the music, dance, and culture of the Middle East by watching Nadia Gamal, Mona al Said, Ibrahim Akef, Farideh Fahmy, Dina, and many others.

Hadia worked in the Middle East, but says it's hard to maintain your dignity in a culture that considers dancers to be prostitutes. But, she says, "there were wonderful artists and a large Arabic population in Europe. I went there to work with good artists and still have a normal life."

While living in Spain for several years, Hadia studied intensely with Flamenco masters and began to explore Oriental Flamenco fusion. Although the evolution of all dance is the result of "fusion that works," she believes it's important to understand the forms being fused. Fusion blends elements to the appropriate music and explores connections and contrasts; it is not something that is simply made up without respect for cultural or artistic integrity.

Hadia will bring that philosophy to her Oriental and Flamenco fusion workshop at Cassandra's College. It's substantial, she admits, but students will get a good understanding of how it's done. She assures us that it's okay to

learn the fusion without knowing Flamenco.

As dancers, we have a responsibility to the culture and the art. "It's up to us to demand excellence and accurate information from our teachers and our performers." She believes that playing dress-up and doing whatever we like is not the way to foster recognition of Middle Eastern dance as an art form, nor to establish a loyal audience.

As the European economy was shifting, Hadia believed it was time to start a new career before she lost track of the reasons she loved dance. She returned to Canada to begin a three-year program to become a Registered Massage Therapist which included anatomy, kinesiology, physiology, and osteopathy. She was amazed to learn how the movements she had done for so many years were actually created. This awareness inspired her to rework the basics of her own dancing, and she is able to explain to students how to find and perform movements. She also discovered that if we are aware of exactly which muscles do what action, we don't need to use *all* the muscles in the general area. The dance becomes simpler, and more relaxed and energy efficient. Hadia underscores the healing power of dance, noting that Oriental dance has almost no potential for injury

if it's practiced correctly. She advises, "If it hurts, don't do it!" Pain is there to warn us that we are injuring our bodies.

Hadia loves creating and teaching choreographies, as they are wonderful tools to transmit understanding of the musical components: rhythms, instrumentation, phrasing, and dynamics. However, she says it's more important to understand and perform a section well than to learn a complete choreography without understanding the elements and techniques involved.

Hadia and Cassandra met in 1989 in Vancouver where Cassandra was teaching a workshop. "Cassandra's a vanguard in this industry," Hadia says, "She pursues and presents this dance as it should be. To be recognized and invited by Cassandra is an honor." The respect is mutual. After seeing one of Hadia's performances, Cassandra told her how moved she was, which brought tears to Hadia's eyes.

Hadia now lives in Montreal, teaching dance and postgraduate seminars in massage and manual therapy techniques. Reflecting on how Oriental dance has become big business, she reminds us: "If you love to dance with all your heart and soul, and do it because you *have* to do it, then it will provide a way for you." A dancer's dancer, indeed.

Upcoming Events

Cassandra's College: Tuesday Topics
Cassandra's College: Festival Forum
Cassandra's Cabaret
Fifteenth Annual Henna Party

Tuesdays, Sept 25–Dec 11
Monday–Sunday, October 15–21
Saturday, December 8
Sunday, January 6

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