



A quarterly publication of Jawaahir Dance Company and The Cassandra School

Volume 15, Number 2 Spring 2007

## Dance, Eat, Sleep... A Wonderful Vacation?

For some, a vacation would not be dancing all day, eating great food at break time, and then going to bed early for a solid night's sleep so you can get up in the morning and do it all again. However, to Jean Courter, this is the ultimate vacation! Jean traveled from St. Augustine, Florida to attend Cassandra's recent Sixth Annual Weeklong Oriental Dance Intensive Workshop. She had wanted to attend a Weeklong for a long time, and was giddy with enthusiasm about her experience. Walking out into the brisk Minnesota winter air after dancing all day was just the icing on the cake.

*Giddy* is the word Jean kept using to describe how she felt throughout the Weeklong, enjoying the wonderful structured classes; the rigor of the dance; and the fabulous teacher who demanded great technique. She enjoyed the daily five-hour format, with conditioning and technique in the mornings and then classes on Tunisian folklore and classic Oriental Dance in the afternoons. The rich music that accompanies Middle Eastern dancing is what draws Jean to this dance form, and so Nichole LeCorgne's music classes were a highlight.

Jean started dancing in 1972 when her kindergarten child came home from school with a flyer about belly dancing. Jean tucked one small child under each arm and ran off to the class. She was hooked! She always lived where there were no master dancers and after having the opportunity to meet Cassandra in 1984, she became intent on finding more ways to dance with her. Jean was living in Northern Michigan at that

time, so she discovered the most economical way to do this was to start a school and bring Cassandra in. This was the catalyst for forming Oasis Dance Camp, the first residential Middle Eastern dance camp in the United States. Jean organizes these annual camps in three locations: Travis City, MI in September; Seattle (Vashon Island), WA in October; and Northern Florida/Southern Georgia in November. This year she's adding a camp in July in Plainfield, Massachusetts, housed in an 1812 renovated farmhouse tucked in the woods featuring two large studios with sprung maple floors, great food, and a wood-stoked sauna.

Each Oasis Dance Camp features Cassandra as the master teacher and one guest teacher with expertise in a particular folkloric style. Nicole LeCorgne brings her talents and energy to accompany technique classes and teach music/percussion. The camp is wonderfully intense: eating meals together and rooming together, along with exchanging ideas and knowledge through rich and expansive conversations.

Oasis Dance Camp is also international! They were invited to go to New Zealand in 2003, sponsored by the National Group of Middle Eastern Dancers, and dancers came from Australia and Tasmania. In 2005, Oasis traveled to Marrakech for two weeks: one week of camp and one week touring Morocco. It was illuminating and enlightening for all the American dancers. Both camps were very successful and there are plans to return this year. For details, you can go to [www.oasisdancecamp.com](http://www.oasisdancecamp.com).

The music of this colorful dance form continues to resonate deeply in Jean's soul, making Middle Eastern dance the *only* dance form in her mind.

Expressing herself through the music inspires Jean to dance more and more. And, Jean added, a joyful part of this ancient dance form is, "you get to play dress-up too."

## Did You Know...

...*nays* (Arabic flutes) are made from reeds cut from a plant much like bamboo which grows along river beds. They are cut in different lengths and diameters to produce varying tones...the smaller the nay, the higher the note. During a performance a musician may play 5-7 different nays, each producing a different scale.

Middle Eastern musicians play a set of scales, known as *maqamat*. There are some rules to follow around the scale intervals, but it is in the modulations of these always changing scales that the individual artist's style comes out — bending and shaping the individual notes, known as *ornamentation*. The sounds can be subtle, quiet, and lingering to the point that an authentic traditional cry of "Ya 'ayni" (loosely translated: "Oh my eye! The beauty is pouring through it.") can be heard from a participant in the audience...a truly moving experience.

## Bridget Robbins

The collaboration of great talent and flowing spirit was once again in the air at the Southern Theater during "The Wanderer (*Sawwah*)," Jawaahir's show this past February. Bridget Robbins was one of the lucky musicians to be a part of this production as the *nay* (Arabic reed flute) player. All who were present felt and celebrated the integration of sound, sight, emotion, and passion.

Bridget is classically trained on the western flute. She began playing *nay* while studying at the University of

California, Santa Barbara in the 1990s. Middle Eastern music is not written down in traditional scores like western music. Some musicians can internalize the music, but Bridget transcribed the notes and scales from the CD that Jawaahir sent her to prepare the music for their choreography. She did this so she could: “claim the music for memory, so I could watch Cassandra dance... she is so humble and genuine.” Bridget loved Cassandra’s personality as expressed through her movements.

Some Middle Eastern music has a call-and-response format. The oud, a pear-shaped string instrument kin to the European lute, is the master of the music and carries the melody. The other instrumentalists are inspired and respond, creating the soul of the sound and intoxicating your senses. The dancers answer with soft undulations and hip movements.

The musicians begin improvising, (*taqasim*) — bending and holding sounds through ornamentation that takes the sound up to a place of ecstasy...dancers flying. The audience responds with their own chants, clapping a beat of approval, bringing the energy of call and response to a new level.

Bridget thought the audiences at the Southern Theater were very energetic,



*Bridget Robbins*

and she appreciated their enthusiasm. Many nights were filled with a remarkable synergy of music, movement, and energy that brought wonderful expressions of verbal praise from the audience. When the state of mystical ecstasy, *tarab*, is reached by the people in the theater, magical moments ensue.

Bridget has long wanted to play with Georges Lamman, whom she met at a Mendocino, CA camp in the early 1990s. A renowned artist, Georges was the Music Director for “*Sawwah*,” played the violin, and performed vocals. This show brought a remarkable

collection of musicians from all over the country performing ten days of pure joy.

Bridget says Cassandra brings talent, love, and spirit together wherever she goes, creating moments in time not be forgotten.

## Not Good Bye... “See You Later”

A heartfelt *See You Later* to Patricia Auch, founding member of Jawaahir Dance Company, and backbone of the administrative operations for the company and The Cassandra School for the past eight years. Patricia will be staying involved with the dance company, remotely, from her new home in the Seattle, Washington area.

A long-time performing artist, Patricia has shared her love of the dance, and mentored hundreds of youth and adults through educational programs since 1973 when she started studying Middle Eastern dance. Patricia has showered us with positive inspiring energy, and will always be a member of our extended family. She will be truly missed.

Eileen Goren will be attempting to fill Patricia’s very large shoes in the Jawaahir office.

## Upcoming Events

Jawaahir performs at the Landmark Center in St. Paul, MN	April 29
Cassandra and Jawaahir: workshop and performance in Chisholm, MN	May 5
Cassandra and Jawaahir perform in Gays Mills, WI	May 12
Jawaahir's 2nd Festival of Oriental Dance — <i>Mark your calendar!</i>	August 6–12

BELEDI BEAT is published quarterly by:  
 Jawaahir Dance Company  
 1940 Hennepin Avenue  
 Minneapolis, Minnesota 55403  
 612-872-6050  
[www.jawaahir.org](http://www.jawaahir.org), [cassandr@jawaahir.org](mailto:cassandr@jawaahir.org)  
 Copyright 2007 Jawaahir Dance Co.