



A quarterly publication of Jawaahir Dance Company and The Cassandra School

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## Saudi Artist Links Past & Future

Have you attended any of the past six Jawaahir shows? If so, you are familiar with the elegant stage designs of visual artist Hend al-Mansour.

Hend, born in Hofuf, Saudi Arabia, practiced medicine there until 1997. Then, seeking escape from Saudi oppression of women, she decided to find another home—in the United States.

Government restrictions can make work frustrating for Saudi artists, says Hend. “A committee must first look at your work to see if it’s acceptable to display. Sacred art that is within the traditions—or scenes of traditional life or landscapes—are fine. But art that makes political statements, or questions religion, is not okay.”

Being born to an artistic family—with a mother who’s a visual artist and a film-making sister—gave Hend an early interest in making art. “People do art a lot in Saudi, but they don’t believe it’s something you learn at school,” she says. “When I came here, I realized that I wanted to be a proficient artist.” She earned an MFA at the Minneapolis College of Art & Design and today uses art to “explore my identity as an Arab woman and how that interacts with my Islamic faith.”

Unlike many Saudi artists, who are heavily influenced by Western art, Hend “makes art in Arabic” by blending calligraphy, images of Arab people, Islamic ornamentation and architecture, henna, and colorful fabrics. By using the Arab culture’s rich resources to expand art forms and traditions, she links the past to the present. “I have an Arab audience here who knows my work,” she says. “It makes them think

### *Hend al-Mansour*

about the Koran and their value system critically, without feeling that they are abandoning their country by doing so. We should feel that we are enriching our country because we are trying to make it better.”

Cassandra says, “When I met Hend, she told me her artistic mission was to present positive images of Arabic women. I felt artistic solidarity with that. The first project she did for Jawaahir was the green scrim that we passed through in the Andalusiat dance. She did designs suggestive of *masharabiya* (carved window screens) in henna on the scrim, and it was the first thing I saw every night when the lights came up. It was so inspiring! I wanted to work with her again, and so far, we have always managed to inspire each other with ideas.”

Hend is designing and painting costumes for one piece in *Sawwah*, called *Aroussat al Moulid* (Brides of the Festival). She drew inspiration from Arab traditional designs and movie musicals, including the kaleidoscopic work of American director/choreographer Busby Berkeley. “I’m so excited about it!” Hend says. “I thought of the stage as a canvas, and

everything on the stage as a design, as if it’s one big, shifting painting.”

Cassandra also inspires Hend. “We bounce ideas—that’s how Cassandra works. I think she likes to give me a spark, and then it turns into a flame...I enjoy working that way. It makes me more involved and passionate about what I do.”

Hend will exhibit “Fatimah in America: An Installation by Hend al-Mansour,” Feb. 5–Mar. 4, 2007, at Hillstrom Museum of Art, Gustavus Adolphus College, St. Peter, MN. To view Hend’s art, visit [www.hend-al-mansour.org](http://www.hend-al-mansour.org).

## Debuting

### “Without Exile”

In keeping with the theme of *Sawwah* (The Wanderer), Jawaahir will debut a theatrical piece inspired by the poem “Who Am I Without Exile?” Written by one of the Arab world’s greatest contemporary poets, Mahmoud Darwish, the poem captured the imagination of the piece’s director, Pamela Nice. Pam, who has directed two Jawaahir shows, says, “I chose the poem because it spoke to me both as an artist and as a traveler who has always wanted to feel at home someplace, but never has.”

How does one create a dance from a poem? It all begins with the idea. Pam says, “After Cassandra and I talk about the idea, I explore it with a scenario: a dramatic story with specific characters, relationships, scenes, and emotional actions. I also suggest staging. Cassandra contributes ideas about which dances and dancers will work best with certain dramatic relationships, events, or characters. After we share ideas about the music, sets, staging, and dances, Cassandra choreographs the dances.”

“Without Exile” explores the complexities of “home” as a state of mind. “Traveling brings new experiences and ideas, and is creative in the way it challenges complacency,” says Pam. “But it is hard not to yearn for home, even if it is only in our imaginations. The catch is, home is never what the heart wants it to be: the place that remains comforting and unchanged.”

## We Couldn't Have Done It Without You!

*The Grand Bazaar*, Jawaahir's Gala Fundraiser on September 28, 2006, raised more than \$7,000! Thank you to the following businesses and individuals for their services: Kirkpatrick Design for donating the design of our invitation, Skyline Graphics for donating printing services, Cathy Wurzer as emcee, Ahmed Tharwat for his story, Latin Sounds and Layalli Sharque for live music, and Eileen Goren and Terry Joyce for their performance.

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### *Pamela Nice*

Aisha Ali/ARAF, Alsadu, Inc., Amorfia Productions/Georges Lammam, Patricia Auch, Bonnie Berquam, Bibelot, Black Forest Inn, Bryant-Lake Bowl and Theater, Mary Lynn Buss, Center for Happiness, Chanhassen Dinner Theatres, Christo's Restaurant, Clutter Tiger Company, Nancy Courteau, Matthew Croy, Michael Croy, Dahlal International, Inc., Egyptique Imports, Jeremy Ellis, Linae Enocks/Five Sisters Dry Goods, Kari Fenelon/Fenelon Sanctuary, Cyndy Fitzgerald, Fuji Ya Japanese Restaurant, Jan Geisen, Giorgio's Restaurant, Graves 601, Great River Tai Chi Ch'uan, Habiba, Rudy Hall/Rudy's Creative Glass Art, Laura Harada, Mary Hoff, Aimee Holmes/Hair Police, Ruby Jazayre, Jerusalem's Restaurant, Mary Kertzman, Kirké, Kvasnik Photography & Frames, Inc., Donna Larson, Tracy LeCapitaine, Nicole LeCorgne, Catherine Liska/Inner Lotus,

Kathy McCurdy, Mediterranean Cruise, Melanie Meyer, Minnesota Twins, Minnesota Vikings, Nicollet Island Inn, Oasis Dance Camp, Tim O'Keefe, Ordway Center for the Performing Arts, Esther Ouray, Jenny Piper (Jemorah), Lucinda Pool/Stained Glass Treasures, Ragamala Music & Dance Theater, Dianna Rawnley, Pamela Ridgway, Jennifer Roden, Kimberly Ross/Le Bourget Aero Suites, Hung Q. Russell, Seattle Sutton's Healthy Eating, Sebastian Joe's, Sheepskin by Susan Bradford, Shimmy Chale, Cassandra Shore, Angela Skrade/Ancient Traditions Mehndi, Hilary Smith, The Southern Theater, Stonehenge Rocks & Rituals, Udjat bead/Shasha, Jane Von Bevern, Rebecca Wandrei, Wedge Co-op, Mary West & Eden Prairie Community Education, Lori Wilczek, Yarnworks/Susan Paul, and Zenon Dance Company & School. We sincerely thank Ann Cathcart and Deborah Carlson for their donation of coupons to reduce the cost of renting the Minneapolis Woman's Club. And to all the attendees—*thank you, thank you, thank you!*

## Dancers Seek Homes

Are you willing to open your home to an out-of-town dancer during Cassandra's weeklong, in return for a small fee? Please call the Jawaahir office at 612-872-6050 if you want to help and have guest space available during the week of March 12–17.

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## Upcoming Events

*Sawwah* (The Wanderer), Southern Theater      Thurs-Sun, February 15–18, 2007  
Call 612-340-1725 for reservations.      Wed-Sun, February 21–25, 2007  
Cassandra's Oriental Dance Intensive Weeklong Workshop      March 12–17, 2007