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## Summer Shimmies at the Weeklong

By Na'imah

In the third week of June, a time when many people are gazing idly out of office windows and thinking about vacations and sunbathing, a group of 26 women gathered in Minneapolis, MN for Cassandra's seventh annual Weeklong Intensive. We had come from places such as Michigan, Wyoming, and Washington state with a common purpose: to become better Oriental dancers and have a lot of fun doing it.

With a staff-to-student ratio of about 6 to 1, we received plenty of individual attention as we shimmied in the summer heat. The morning technique classes were a challenge for beginners and professionals alike as Cassandra led us through basic movements, then combined the movements, then asked us to travel in pairs across the floor while doing the combinations, and, finally, the dreaded words, "Let's add a shimmy to that."

Although I am confident of my grounding in basic Oriental techniques, every year I discover some nuance of which I had been previously unaware. My notes from each Weeklong are full of exclamation points and notes in all caps: "DON'T LET KNEES COLLAPSE INWARDS!" and "WHY AM I LOOKING AT THE FLOOR?" and the somewhat less helpful note to myself: "DOING IT WRONG. STOP IT." Also frequent in my notes are sketches and diagrams of Cassandra showing a familiar movement in an unexpected way. My students benefit from my participation in the Weeklong because I inevitably pick up new drills, techniques and tips they've never heard



Weeklong 2008 attendees

before.... I definitely return home a smarter and more assured teacher.

This year's afternoon classes offered information on performance topics ranging from Arabic musical nuance to structuring an Oriental show. We enjoyed lectures from Nicole LeCorgne (ethnomusicologist and master percussionist), who de-mystified the music by discussing how to listen for and respond to different elements including rhythms, *maqamaat* (musical modes), melodic phrasing, and ornamentation; and Peg Deppe, who discussed regional textiles in the Arabic world and brought in a large rack of garments as examples. Cassandra's lectures covered everything from tips on how to dance *taqasim* (instrumental improvisations) to how stage placement can be used to evoke different emotional responses from an audience. I am sure she could have lectured for many (many!) more hours on these subjects, and I would gladly have remained for all of it. Often teachers neglect cultural and musical topics because the material is intangible and difficult for students to assimilate (unlike a new choreography or

technique class); but Cassandra generously shared her experience in ways that were both accessible to the average learner and immediately useful in improving performance.

There were three performances: Wednesday's student performance, an Enchanted Evening with Jawaahir on Friday night, and Cassandra's Cabaret on Saturday. The student performances were fun and gave everyone a chance to shine. On Friday, Jawaahir thrilled the audience with selections that covered the spectrum from classical solo dance to avant garde troupe numbers — immaculately conceived and staged, beautifully performed, and, as always, in the greatest taste and with ineffable style. The Cabaret was a departure from the standard Saturday night theatre show, featuring an elegant cabaret setting with tables and champagne. There were solo performances from two workshop participants, a lovely dancer from Minneapolis, and the show's highlight: Cassandra performing with a musical ensemble. The shows were diverse and colorful, and ended much too quickly despite scorching summer heat!

I look forward to next year's Weeklong Intensive (March 16–21) not only to catch up with old friends and learn new techniques, but as a yearly infusion of grace, skill, and integrity that gives me confidence to stretch for new artistic horizons as a dancer.

*Na'imah is a professional dancer, teacher, and performance coach from Grand Rapids, MI. After several years' attendance at Cassandra's Weeklong, she's stopped having nightmares about doing traveling steps layered with shimmies. You can learn more about Na'imah at [www.naimah.net](http://www.naimah.net).*

## Thank You!

We couldn't do what we do without our generous supporters!

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## Upcoming Events

Cassandra at Oasis Dance Camp North  
Cassandra at Oasis Dance Camp West  
Arab Dance Seminar, Cambridge, MA  
Cassandra at Oasis Dance Camp Morocco

Sept 10–14  
Oct 8–12  
Oct 24–26  
Nov 3–18

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