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Girls' Night *Qat* IN

Mashrabiyya (mush-ra-bee-ya) are architectural latticework, most often made of wood, that cover second and third floor windows of traditional residences in the Arab world. While they are intricately carved and ornamental, as a practical matter, mashrabiyya serve both social and environmental purposes. They veil women from the gaze of men, while the latticework allows air circulation in the hot, arid climate. The screening effect that allows the women to look out, but no one else to see in, is key to appreciating what happens behind them in the women's quarters, and an essential element of Jawaahir Dance Company's annual show at the Southern Theater this March. Parties, sharing, socializing, and especially dancing within that privacy of the women's quarters have also been heavily influenced by the global culture of today's world. That globalization has been nurtured, particularly in the Arabian Gulf region, by YouTube and the recent launch of MTV Arabia.

What safer place could there be than behind the screens to feel both grounded by tradition and creatively inspired? Traditionally, women's creativity is often not seen. *Girls' Night Qat IN*, Jawaahir's annual show at the Southern Theater, is a rare opportunity to witness their lives and creativity through Cassandra Shore's beautiful choreography based in part on her experiences behind the screens. We'll see both fun and serious happenings in the women's quarters.

Cassandra's last trip to Morocco provided some inspiration for this show. She was invited to have tea in the women's quarters, where the women danced and showed each other how their Middle Eastern and Western

clothing, hair, and jewelry is worn. Cassandra notes, if you were spending an evening with other women, you would, in fact, listen to many different kinds of music. She worked with the music director, Kay Hardy Campbell, to develop the show structure and flow.

The music was selected in conjunction with the theme because the dance is music-driven. Music plays a very important part in Arabic culture, and the tastes of the young women are varied, from more traditional sounds, to a thriving underground hip-hop scene, to superstar dance DJs spinning mixes. Jawaahir's show will encompass all of that—classical, traditional, and contemporary—as well as many surprises. Recorded, electronic music will be used along with the live all-women al Hareem Orchestra. An all-women orchestra is appropriate to the theme of girls' night in. There's a long history of female musicians in the Middle East. Al Hareem is comprised of world-class musicians including Beth Bahia Cohen and Laura Harada on violin, Kay Hardy Campbell on oud, Anne Elise Thomas on kanoon, Nicole LeCorgne and Susu Pampanin on drums, and Bridget Robbins on nay.

The experience will be enriched by the unique lighting design of Jeff Bartlett, Artistic Director of the Southern Theater.

This show is surely not to be missed! Please join Cassandra and Jawaahir Dance Company for an ecstatic, eclectic, energizing, and enlightening evening of original choreographies of traditional and contemporary dance and music from the Arabic-speaking world. Jawaahir's Annual Concert at the Southern Theater featuring the al Hareem Orchestra will take place March 20 through 23 and March 26 through 30, 2008 at 8:00

p.m., and 7:00 p.m. Sundays. Tickets are \$27.00, with a pay-as-able performance on Wednesday, March 26, 2008. For tickets and reservations call 612-340-1725.

Did You Know...

...Women's songs are an ancient tradition of the Arabian Peninsula that continues to this day. Until now largely unknown to the outside world, this music is becoming available to a global audience, thanks to the recording and video-production industries in the Arabian Gulf countries.

In Saudi Arabia, women's folk songs are most frequently heard at women's wedding parties, and thus remain an art by and for women. Other formal performances of women's music occur when a patron hires a folk band for a private party in her home to entertain her family and women friends.

The basic structure of the musical performance includes a lead singer, or *mutriba*, who heads a group of between 10 and 15 players as chorus and drummers, many of whom are friends and family.

Throughout the Peninsula, women's folk songs consist of simple repeated melodies overlying complex repeated polyrhythms that pulse steadily through songs lasting up to 15 minutes. The melody usually stays in a single *maqam* (mode or scale) and is repeated throughout a series of verses, sung in colloquial Arabic, as well as both choral and instrumental refrains. The singer embellishes the melody with modest ornamentation, if any at all. While the structure is simple, the interplay between the melody and the layers of percussion is hypnotic.

Excerpted from Saudi Aramco World "Days of Song and Dance" Jan/Feb 1999 by Kay Hardy Campbell.

Bloomington Beautification

The exterior of the nondescript strip mall in Bloomington belies the bright, beautiful basement studio behind the door to Suite 115. Although Kathy McCurdy had been teaching belly dance here for Stage Arts for several years, the space was acquired by The Cassandra School in 2006 when the owner retired.

At the time, it was far from bright and beautiful. Ms. McCurdy and her students began talking about painting the walls and hanging a few pictures to brighten things up. The talk generated excitement, and plans quickly grew as they envisioned the possibilities of an inspired place of their own. And so it was that they embarked on an ambitious remodeling project that would take a year and a half to complete.

It was very much a group effort from the beginning. Students, spouses, children, friends, and the instructor volunteered nearly all of the time and materials needed to remove a large wall, re-plaster, lay and polish flooring, add electrical outlets, install mirrors, and paint the concrete walls. It now consists of two rooms: the vestibule and a studio that's much larger than it was before. The vestibule is divided into



3 Bloomington studio murals

sitting and changing areas by a heavy, gorgeous curtain made by Ms. McCurdy.

The crowning glory of the "new" studio, however, is the masterful artwork designed and painted by local artist and dancer Kim Ballard. Ms. Ballard spent 17 years in the advertising industry and now devotes herself to her art full-time, creating portraits and figurative work in oil.

Starting with the concept of a Persian rug, Ballard researched Middle Eastern designs, motifs, hues, and diagrams for inspiration. As the walls were pale, she wanted to add depth and color. The spectacular results are two murals framing both doors that lead from the studio to the vestibule and from the vestibule into the hallway.

The studio door is outlined in an onion-shaped dome sitting atop pillars. The door from the hallway is done on the inside in a similar, complementary style with a modified dome. When viewed from the studio, the hallway door and its painting are framed by the painted studio door, creating a cave-like effect that's majestic and dramatic, yet inviting. When viewed up close, one truly appreciates the time and talent involved in the detail work. It flows, both within itself and from one door to the other, stirring a desire to linger, enjoy, enter, and be part of the place to which it leads. The hallway door is also beautifully stenciled on both sides with "The Cassandra School."

Thanks to all of the other dedicated and hard working dancers and their helpers, including Lucy LeMay, Jean and Jeri Petit, Mark and Darlene Dragan, and Karen and Glen Libra. More of Kim Ballard's work can be viewed at www.kimballard.com.

Upcoming Events

Cassandra's Cabaret
Annual Concert Season: *Girls' Night Out IN* at Southern
Caravan Under the Stars: Jawaahir Gala and Fundraiser
Cassandra's Weeklong Intensive

Saturday, February 23
March 20-30
Saturday, May 10
June 16-21

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