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## Sparkles in My Eyes

### *A gem in the middle of one dancer's journey*

Excerpted from article by Maya Christina\*

The lights fade to an enthusiastic crescendo of applause, zagareets, and shouts. Six dancers in elegant rhinestone dresses edge past me in the dark; their exhilaration is nearly tangible in the air at a successful *danse orientale* performance. The lights brighten slightly; I glance at the network of twinkling lights overhead, reminding me of starlight and canvas tents. I test the tassels of my Tunisian yarn belt one last time. Beside me, Cassandra herself — behind-the-scenes stage manager for this show — flashes me a grin; I draw confidence from the ease of my mentor. The lights fade; *fezzani* music begins, quiet at first; the lights brighten slowly, and I imagine the sun rising on a village market, so much that I can almost smell the dust in the morning air and hear the sounds of a new day. The drum begins, my right foot moves, and I once again am in my element...

It's been a decade since I last shared the stage with Cassandra and the Jawaahir dancers. Since then, I've traveled far, and frequently, encountering many dance interpretations and artistic communities, every place I visit, unique. Although I've had many exciting adventures and experienced a myriad of novel outlooks, in my heart, The Cassandra School and Jawaahir Dance Company has remained my artistic home.

This past fall, Cassandra called on Jawaahir alumni to share the stage once again with their colleagues in Minneapolis. Three of us were fortunate



*Maya Christina in Sparkle*

enough to have the time and means to join in this new, Jawaahir-produced artistic venture. As on two other occasions in the past, Cassandra turned artistic control over to company members and apprentices of Jawaahir to create new choreographies, which resulted in new choreographies as unique as the individuals who created them.

For all the glitter and glory of a successful, troupe-produced show, in some ways, producing and integrating multiple Jawaahir members' choreographies is more challenging than the troupe dancing to Cassandra's masterful creations. From earlier Jawaahir experiences, I realize that learning choreographies from troupe colleagues rather than one's dance mentor comes with both frustrations and rewards, and that choreographing for one's colleagues under the discerning eye of master choreographer Cassandra can be quite intimidating. However, this end product, these "sparkles" resulting from months of hard work, muscle strain, frustrations, and accomplishments, has turned out to be something phenomenal, a true set of "gems from Jawaahir."

And, as I continue my dance journey into Canada and future lands unknown, there are some "sparkles" from this show that I know will continue to inspire me. As a few examples, recalling the playfulness of Peg's fantasy folkloric and Kathy's "happy bouncy" choreographies will encourage a smile when I face difficult artistic challenges. Eileen's incredible and fast spins in the middle of a swirling montage of dancers in street-wear, her grin catching the audience with each turn, still "wows" me. The joy expressed in the Russian Gypsies, with their flashing skirts and dashing heels, and the excitement of Amina's Turkish spoons has opened new dance horizons for me. Lilah's passionate dance makes my heart ache with the beauty of her performance and has taught me a new level of dance expression. Every nuance of Cassandra's performance in Helen's *Phantoms*, like a movie etched in my mind, will remain with me always, as only Cassandra's dance can do. And of course, spending time with dance friends and new colleagues, in addition to once again being under the mentorship of Cassandra, however briefly, was priceless. In short, all of my experiences, as performer, colleague, dance student, and audience member, have been inspirational, and have added many a sparkling facet to my own dance "gem."

## Website Fun Facts

Excerpted from article by Terry Joyce\*

It's been a year since we added Google Analytics to the Jawaahir site and it's fascinating to see how our site is being used. Google Analytics is a free program from Google that allows us to track where our website traffic is

coming from, and what our visitors do while they're here with us.

First, the big picture. In February 2009, 3,500 people visited our website from 80 countries, with a total of 10,500 pages being viewed. These numbers show an increase of about 15% from when we started keeping records last year. As one might guess, 3,000 visitors, or 86% of the total, come from the US, followed by 58 visitors from Canada, 47 from Saudi Arabia, 46 from Egypt, and 32 from the U.K. There were 651 different search terms used that led to our site.

We had 1,200 visits in February from Minneapolis. The average Minneapolis visitor viewed 3 pages and spent an average of 3 minutes on the site. According to Google, these are respectable numbers—these visitors are finding content that they want. The next three cities with the highest number of visitors to the Jawaahir site in February are Burnsville, St. Paul, and Hopkins. The fifth city is New York with 84 visits. The average visitor from New York also looked at 3 pages and spent 2 minutes on the site—not very different from the Minneapolis visitors, indicating that they are finding content that they want to look at and that the site has appeal to a larger area.



*Jawaahir in Qamar Wa Nejoom (Moon and Stars), from Sparkle*

After New York comes Rochester, MN then Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia has consistently been the third highest country to visit the Jawaahir website over the last year. In February the 43 visitors from Riyadh viewed 2.4 pages and spent over one minute on site. Other foreign visitors included the three from Zurich who viewed on average 5 pages and spent 7 minutes on the site and the 4 visitors from Hiroshima who also viewed 4 pages and spent 5 minutes on the site.

The Calendar button on the home

page was clicked 863 times in February, or 28 times per day. During a recent snowstorm, it was clicked 120 times or 4 times the daily average. I attribute this to the fact that the calendar is where we notify students of class cancellations and they are using the website to stay informed.

So to end, thanks to everyone who has been directly involved in getting the website up and improving it. Thank you all for letting me play with you and change a little bit of the world.

\*Full articles on line at [www.jawaahir.org](http://www.jawaahir.org)

## Upcoming Events

Enchanted Evening, Jawaahir show at the studio  
Cassandra's Cabaret: Spring Fever  
Caravan Under the Stars: Jawaahir Gala and Fundraiser  
Annual Concert Season: *Raqs Nouveau* at Southern

Friday, February 22  
Saturday, March 21  
Thursday, May 21  
August 13–23

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