



A quarterly publication of Jawaahir Dance Company and The Cassandra School

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## Nesma, Our Friend

One of our favorite artists in the dance community is Nesma from Madrid, Spain. Jawaahir was honored to feature her as a guest artist for *The Dark Nightingale* and taught two orientale dance workshops at The Cassandra School while she was here performing in the annual show last summer. Her charming personality, softly accented English, and beautiful performances earned her the admiration of dancers and audience members alike. Like Cassandra, Nesma is one of the world-wide masters of Middle Eastern dance, a busy overachiever, striving to bring Middle Eastern dance to audiences outside the region by sharing authentic music and culture through her performances.

For five years Nesma danced as a soloist with her own orchestra in over 3,500 shows in many of Cairo's most prestigious venues, accompanied by the singer Karim Mahmoud. When she moved back to Spain in 1999, she founded the Al Andalus Centre of Oriental Dance and the Al-Andalus Dance Company. She has performed and taught world-wide in 13 countries. She is also the mother of two children. This accomplished and very busy woman said that Cassandra has long been someone she's wanted to emulate.

Before she became a student of Middle Eastern dance, Nesma had danced flamenco and other folkloric dances. She became a Middle Eastern dance master all because of a fluke. Her brother ran a comedy variety show and asked her to appear in it as a belly dancer, and she felt like she should learn something about it, rather than fake it. After her first lesson, "orientale dance touched my heart," she said, and soon enough she felt compelled



Nesma in *The Dark Nightingale*

*Photo by Jan Geisen*

to go to Cairo to learn more. When she had arrived from Cairo, she struggled to meet people and learn the language. But she had in her possession three VHS tapes of belly dancers. One was of Cassandra. "It was like a treasure," Nesma said. "She is an idol to me."

Nesma also appreciates what Cassandra does to impart the cultural and musical heritage of Middle Eastern dance. Some current commercial trends in belly dance bother her because "there is no context" regarding the culture, costume, and dance styles. "It all looks the same." Nesma stressed the importance of looking deeper. "It is so important to know the culture," she said, when you are studying Middle Eastern dance. "Travel a lot. Learn a little bit of Arabic. Go to weddings, watch people dance, learn the music, go to see shows."

Nesma believes Cassandra's dedication to sharing the culture with Minnesota audiences is simply amazing. "I wish to have her! She has incredible knowledge. I don't know anyone like her.

I travel a lot. I have a school. But she's the only one in the world doing what she does. The people must realize how lucky they are. Nobody does this. Nobody! It's an opportunity for the dancers and the audience."

In Jawaahir's annual production, *The Dark Nightingale* at the Ritz Theater last summer, Cassandra performed a beautiful taqsim, an improvisational dance that is both intense and controlled. It served as an emotional highpoint in the sequence of the show, and with the music's slow and dramatic tempo change, it also provided a refreshing pause and a sense of catharsis for the audience.

Nesma gushed about *The Dark Nightingale*—the choreography, the musicians who learned the music to her dances, the talented Jawaahir dance company. "I feel really lucky to be here," she said about her experience as a guest artist. Now that she's finally met Cassandra in person, Nesma said she will always think of her as *the Queen of Taqsim*. "Her secret must be she enjoys it so much. She is a dancer rich to my heart. So much beauty."

## Thank you, Friends!

Throughout the year, Jawaahir and The Cassandra School launch an impressive amount of programming: the annual henna party, Cassandra's weeklong, the gala, Jawaahir's annual show, and Cassandra College courses, along with many special performances and other workshops. We'd like to thank our audience members and friends for their generous contribution to all the dance company's activities. Our mission is ambitious, yet with the support of many people we have accomplished much of lasting value here in the Twin Cities and in communities abroad.

## Government, Foundations, and Corporations

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*Over the last year the following companies and individuals have donated items that have enhanced every Jawaahir event:* Alliance Francaise, Alsadu, Inc., Ansari's Mediterranean Grill & Lounge, Apogee Custom Gifts, Arthur Murray Dance Center, Patricia Auch, Bast Lastion, Benessere - Body

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## Coming Events

Cassandra's Cabaret: The Inappropriate Cabaret  
Cassandra's Cabaret  
18th Annual Henna Party  
Weeklong Intensive

October 30  
December 4  
January 16  
March 21-26

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