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The Dark Nightingale (*al-'Andaleeb al-Asmar*)

Jawaahir Dance Company's annual show is always a breathtaking music and dance experience that goes beyond performance to celebrate the culture and origins of Middle Eastern dance. This year's show promises to be another extraordinary evening that merges the soul and the spirit of Arab, North African, and European influences on Middle Eastern dance and music.

Jawaahir is excited to present *The Dark Nightingale*, centered around the beloved music of late Egyptian singer Abdel Halim Hafez. The renowned Georges Lammam Ensemble, featuring virtuosic Arabic musicians from across the nation, sets the backdrop for unforgettable dances by Jawaahir, Cassandra, and Spanish guest artist Nesma al-Andalus. The show also features choreography by Jawaahir company members Kathy McCurdy and Helen Voelker. Nesma and riq player Karim Nagi are also offering several workshops while they're here.

The Dark Nightingale signals an exciting artistic development for Jawaahir in its first production at the Ritz Theater. Artistic Director Cassandra Shore said that she is inspired to explore aspects of Arabic music and dance that many American audiences of Middle Eastern dance are not often exposed to. Abdel Halim has long been a legendary favorite of dancers and musicians the world over, and Cassandra is creating new choreographies for his music.

Abdel Halim Hafez, the musical inspiration for this year's annual show, was known as *al-'Andaleeb al-Asmar* (the Dark Nightingale). Despite a fairly short



Nesma Al-Andalus

career, he was one of the most influential Egyptian stars of the 1950s and 60s. He is widely considered to be one of the four greats of Egyptian and Arabic music, along with Umm Kalthoum, Mohammed Abdel Wahab, and Farid Al Atrache. His mellow, resonant voice, subtle vocal style, and notably clean intonation led to him earning the "nightingale" moniker.

Abdel Halim studied at Cairo's Institute of Arabic Music and the Higher Institute for Theatre Music, and began his career teaching and playing oboe. During the 1960s, he started to sing colloquial poetry more closely related to popular folk song than ordinary pop songs. Abdel Halim died in 1977, a few months short of his 48th birthday. His funeral in Cairo was attended by millions of people—more than any funeral in Egyptian history except those of President Nasser (1970) and Umm Kalthoum (1975). Abdel Halim's music is still very popular, and he is widely regarded as one of the most virtuosic singers in the Arab world. Cassandra said she was moved to honor

this profoundly important Egyptian artist, much in keeping with Jawaahir Dance Company's homage to Umm Kalthoum staged in 2004.

It has been a number of years since Jawaahir has welcomed a guest artist to the annual show, and Cassandra is delighted to bring to the Twin Cities the exceptional Nesma al-Andalus from Spain. Nesma's appearance performing Andalusian dance will shed light on an Arab dance form that has nearly been lost.

In the southern region of Spain, known as Al-Andalus from the years 711 to 1492, Arabs ruled until their expulsion by Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand. The years of Arab rule were a notable time in history when mathematics, architecture, music, literature, and dance sparked the courts and culture of Spain. The area was also a vibrant melting pot of religions, people, and cultures that, by and large, lived peacefully together.

The music of Al-Andalus is very much alive today, and draws from Moorish, Sephardic, and Gypsy influences. While the Arab roots of flamenco run deep in contemporary dance, some of the court dances of Al-Andalus were nearly forgotten. Artists like Nesma al-Andalus are part of a cadre of dancers, particularly in Spain, who are looking to reassert the tradition of Arab Al-Andalus dance through contemporary Middle Eastern dance forms.

Nesma al-Andalus is one of the worldwide masters of Middle Eastern dance, and her Twin Cities performance debut is something special. Nesma was born, raised, and lives in Spain, but in the early 1990s she studied oriental and folkloric dance in Cairo with Rokia Hassan, Ibrahim Akeef, and Farida Fahmy. Nesma is one of a handful of

non-Egyptians to be licensed to dance in Egyptian clubs, and was the only non-Egyptian to be chosen as a member of the National Folkloric Ballet in Egypt. For five years she danced as a soloist with her own orchestra in over 3,500 shows in many of Cairo's most prestigious venues.

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 in 13 countries. She is a master of the classic *raqs sharqi* as well as a force for recreating the dances of Al Andalus through her dance company. Her performances are remarkable for their affecting emotionalism in elegant, expressive movements.

Nesma has released numerous CDs of music composed for her dancing. It was through her CDs and mutual friends that Cassandra first learned of her amazing talent. In true au currant fashion, Cassandra "friended" Nesma on Facebook, and their mutual admiration for each other drew them closer, which eventually led to an invitation to perform in *The Dark Nightingale*. "I'm very excited to be introducing Nesma to our region," Cassandra said about Nesma's appearance and Egyptian dance workshops.

Cassandra described Al-Andalus dance as "majestic and elegant, with a courtly feel—graceful..." and said that *The Dark Nightingale* as a whole reflects that sensibility. Through the combination of music and dance, audience members will feel the intensity of Abdel Halim's emotionally resonant music and be enchanted by the sights and sounds of medieval Al-Andalus. The Ritz Theater offers an opportunity for different stagings for Jawaahir and the musicians, creating new synergies for their expressive collaboration.

The violin virtuosity of Georges Lammam returns to rock the Ritz, along with Arabic music superstars Elias Lammam (accordion and vocals), Naser Musa Janini (oud and vocals), the inimitable Karim Nagi (riq and percussion), Nicole LeCorgne (tabla), and Miles Jay (bass), and joined by amazing local artists Tim O'Keefe (percussion), Laura Harada (violin), Dawn Doering (nay), and Salah Abdel Fattah (violin).

Cassandra is also thrilled to welcome Karim Nagi to the musical ensemble this year. Karim is offering three workshops concurrent with the show's run. "He's an amazing musician and I hope people use this opportunity to take his workshops. He really wants American dancers to

understand the music," Cassandra said.

Cassandra also said everyone involved in the show, from dancers to musicians, is so meticulous about their performances with Jawaahir because they are driven by their passion to share Arabic music and dance with audiences. "We want everyone to come, enjoy the music and dancing, and have a wonderful time."

The Dark Nightingale **(al-'Andaleeb al-Asmar)**

August 26–September 5, 2010

Ritz Theater, 345 13th Ave NE, Mpls.
All shows at 8:00 pm. Tickets \$28.
Open seating.

TICKETS: www.RitzDolls.org
or call 612-436-1129

Karim Nagi Workshops: *Tabla* (for drummers); *Musicality* (for dancers); *Drum Solos: Dancer-Drummer Communications* (for dancers and drummers)

Nesma Al-Andalus Workshops: *Modern Style Classic Oriental Dance; Egyptian Baladi*

All workshops at the Minneapolis Jawaahir Studios.

FFI: www.jawaahir.org

Coming Events

Minnesota Garlic Festival, Hutchinson, MN
The Dark Nightingale, Ritz Theater
Karim and Nesma Workshops
8&8 at the Ritz

August 14
Aug 26 – Sept 5
Aug 30–31, Sept 4
Sept 10–11

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