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Weeklong Intensive Preview

There are dance workshops—and then there is Cassandra’s Oriental Dance Intensive Workshop. Held annually for 8 years now, Cassandra’s “Intensive” as it is known colloquially, goes way beyond learning new steps and choreography. The weeklong event engages everyone—from beginning dancers to professionals—both artistically and physically in ways that encourage growth and understanding. The 2011 workshop is being held March 21–26.

Cassandra’s Weeklong Intensive is as much about immersion into Arabic music and culture as it is about dance. The Intensive is designed as a program that encourages dancers to embrace the dance through explanations of Arabic music, and exposure to the historical customs and traditions that have given rise to contemporary oriental dance. If your goals include learning jaw-dropping choreography, studying technique with a master, and spending a week gloriously and thoroughly engrossed in your passion for dance and Arabic culture, then you must experience Cassandra’s Weeklong Intensive.

Like many Intensives before it, this year’s offers a series of technique and conditioning classes accompanied by live percussion, teaching assistants to give participants personal attention, take-home choreography, and lectures and demonstrations by experts in Arabic culture, music, and art. Included in the week’s schedule is a participant dinner and show, a Cabaret with four guest artists, and an Enchanted Evening with Jawaahir Dance Company, as well as myriad opportunities to enhance your



Whirling Dervishes

dance portfolio including access to professional photography and costume vendors and the fabulous Angela of Ancient Traditions Mehndi who is available to do complimentary henna designs.

Dancers who have grown up in Western cultures don’t often get the opportunity to have such an intimate explanation of the meaning behind the music. Cassandra believes it makes for a stronger connection to the dance form, and she is passionate about the Intensive’s focus on Arabic music appreciation.

Many of the rhythms students are exposed to have deep traditional roots in Arabic poetry and music. For example, the oriental choreography from last year’s Intensive was “Hob Kullu.” In addition to learning the steps, dancers gathered for an hour-long workshop led by Nicole LeCorgne and Tim O’Keefe where they demonstrated “Hob Kullu’s” particular rhythms, how to identify them as listeners, and how to count them as dancers. The purpose was not only to review the music with the choreography, but to demonstrate its rhythmic structure in order to foster greater understanding of Arabic music.

Likewise, the folkloric style offering last year was focused on the Tannoura, a fascinating whirling-dervish-like dance with historic and religious significance

in Egypt that has also become popular entertainment. All aspects of the Tannoura were demonstrated by Cassandra: the giant finger cymbals and the costuming—which includes a skirt that raises high above the knees when you turn, colorful vests and shirts, and a scarf that is designed to contain, and then expose the dancer’s hair—as well as an explanation of the music, technique, and meaning behind specific movements. Knowing this rich history is not only informative, but gives dancers insight into why learning Tannoura is worthwhile.

“I’ve traveled a lot this past year,” Cassandra said, and her plans for this year’s Intensive are to pass on more of what she’s learned and been inspired by in her travels. “I just want to keep exposing people to the music and how to dance to it, to see how the movements fit with the rhythms.” Cassandra’s Intensive welcomes everyone. “We have a lot of levels of students at the Intensive. The material is there; it’s up to you to open whatever door you’re ready to walk through.”

Anyone who participates in the Intensive leaves enriched by the experience. Maryanne Cottrell is a beginning dancer who lives in New Jersey and made the trip to Minnesota for the Intensive because she had attended one of Cassandra’s workshops in Philadelphia and loved it so much. She said that there were so many enjoyable moments at the Intensive—the shows, the other participants, the live drummer, the beautiful choreography—“that I kept saying to myself, I can’t believe I’m here.”

For Lauren Olson, a Minnesota dancer studying Middle Eastern dance since 2006, the Intensive provides a unique opportunity to hone her skills as a dancer. She especially likes the fact that participants get a lot of personal attention

at the Intensive. “I not only learned a lot about Middle Eastern dance, but movement in general. I had a lot of things pointed out to me that I have been able to work and improve upon ever since then. It was an absolutely invaluable experience.”

It is this level of support that has given dancers who attend the Intensive confidence to reach their goals. Rosemary Erb, a former professional ballet dancer and level-four Cassandra School student in Minnesota, said that the Intensive stretched her abilities and helped her move up in her studies. “At the Intensive you get things you don’t get in regular class; it’s a good experience, and I felt like I went up a level afterward. You really learn a lot from the assistants, and you get to meet a lot of different people.”

Sabrina Merrill is a performer and teacher in Michigan who attended her first Intensive last year after many years attending Oasis Dance Camp North. She did it because she wanted to have more time with Cassandra as a teacher. “I leave with new inspiration, stronger technique, new steps, new combinations, a different feel of the music—and I always learn something new about another culture. I love sharing the information I get with my audiences and my students.”

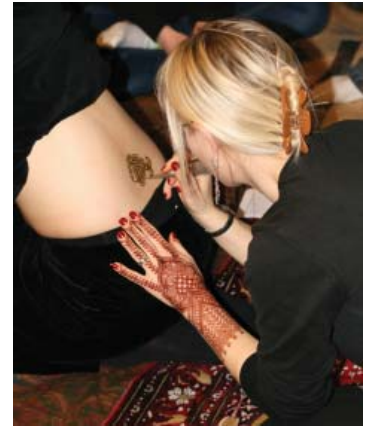
Sabrina also found the Intensive fostered a very encouraging learning environment. “One of my favorite things is the feeling of cooperation and friendship that the Intensive environment has. I believe this is due largely to the way the classes are run and what Cassandra brings to her teaching.”

Henna Party!!!

Jawaahir’s eighteenth Annual Henna Party is back by popular demand! Delight in an afternoon of henna, dance, food, and fun as we once again bring the Middle East to the Midwest.

This year’s Jawaahir performance starts at 2:00 p.m. and features special party dances including “Raq Assaya,” an Egyptian cane dance; the pop song “Nar” by the incomparable Gawaaher; a drum solo; and Amr Diab’s “Alem Allah.” Also performing: three soloists and a Cassandra School Level 3 student group.

In addition to the party’s informal dance instruction, food, and raffles, we have henna painting and an opportunity to win a henna design by Angela of Ancient Traditions Mehndi. Bring pillows and blankets to relax on; henna supplies are provided.



Angela of Ancient Traditions Mehndi

Two raffles: Win a chance to have Angela of Ancient Traditions Mehndi work her magic on you. Henna raffle tickets are \$5, and we’ll pull 15 lucky winners. Also, we’re raffling off two 10-week sessions of Level 1 or Level 2 classes at The Cassandra School. Class raffle tickets are \$10.

Tickets are available on-line now, or, as always, you may purchase tickets at the door—there’s plenty of room for all!

18th Annual Henna Party
Sunday, January 16, 2011.
Jawaahir Studios, Minneapolis
2:00–5:00 P.M. \$12.

Call 612-872-6050, or email us at booking@jawaahir.org.

Coming Events

18th Annual Henna Party
 Cassandra’s Cabaret
 Cassandra’s Weeklong Oriental Dance Intensive
 Caravan Under the Stars (Annual Gala)

January 16
 February 26
 March 21–26
 May 19

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