

# BELEDI BEAT

A quarterly publication of Jawaahir Dance Company and The Cassandra School

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## Happy Birthday to The Cassandra School!

The Cassandra School is 30 years old! Over the years, thousands of dance students have walked through our doors and shimmied out again. We asked Cassandra to share her recollection of the school's early days:

"It was 1978, the height of the belly-dance boom. I had been teaching in the basement of the nightclubs and in community education, but found it difficult to take students beyond a certain level without additional classes. We started the school in a studio on Lyndale Avenue in Minneapolis. Eden Torres taught beginning classes and I taught three advanced classes on Saturdays, while also performing two half-hour shows five or six nights a week at the clubs. Our first classes cost three dollars for an hour and a half instruction! The school moved twice—to an old machine shop on East Lake Street and a ballroom in Dinkytown—before finally ending up at our current location on Hennepin and Franklin in 1988. In 1989, I formed Jawaahir Dance Company by auditioning advanced students from the school. Today, nine teachers offer 31 classes per week in three locations, including St. Paul and Bloomington. As always, we have students who dance for fun and fitness, and those who go on to teaching and performing careers. Everyone is welcome!"

As we celebrate the 30<sup>th</sup> birthday of the Cassandra School, we'd love to hear from you! Email your recollections to Eileen at [booking@jawaahir.org](mailto:booking@jawaahir.org)



*The Cassandra School's first studio, 34<sup>th</sup> & Lyndale, 1980*

## Company Choreography Show

In 2009, Jawaahir Dance Company will celebrate its twentieth anniversary! We'll kick off a year of special celebrations with our annual Henna Party in January followed by our third Company Choreography show in February. This show will present a feast of new work created by Jawaahir's multi-talented members and apprentices. We checked in with a few of the dancers to see what treats they're cooking up for you.

Dancer/teacher Peg Deppe describes her piece *Gol Rabat* as a "smorgasbord of North African folk dance, particularly the Saidi style of Upper Egypt," but adds, "think of it as 'fantasy folklore,' rather than a strict interpretation." Peg was partly inspired

by her love of the Saidi style. "I really like the relaxed Saidi feel, as well as the sense of community in folk dance," she explains. "In folkloric dancing, there's more room for interaction between the dancers. It's not as formal as the classical Oriental style." Peg is currently pursuing her Ph.D. in Dress Ethnography from the University of Minnesota, and her studies have also influenced her choreography, in particular Andrea Rugh's book *Reveal and Conceal: Dress in Contemporary Egypt*. "The costumes for *Gol Rabat* include long semi-circular veils that can swirl freely about the hips, or be wrapped more closely around the body" she says. "The dancers manipulate the veils so they frame, then obscure, the movement. A daring moment is followed by a return to modesty. The affect is flirty yet fresh, charming but unaffected, like a naughty child who has gotten away with something."

Unfortunately, Peg will be so busy finishing her dissertation in February that she may not be able to attend the show. "I'm going to finish the choreography and then fall off the face of the earth for a few months," she laughs.

Meanwhile, Jawaahir dancer/teacher Helen Voelker is working on two dances. The first is a veil quartet that grew out of her Level 3 technique class. "I've noticed a lot of students tend to create dreamy, slow veil dances, and that's fine," she explains. "But I wanted to show that you can do fast, dramatic movements and let the fabric have more punch to it. My goal is to dazzle the audience with color and movement. The fun is in alternating moments of almost-too-much movement with moments of calm where the audience can catch their breath." The second piece, a quintet, is more abstract. "I'm working with the idea of attraction and repulsion. If you're struggling with something in life, you're also attached to it; otherwise, you would just let it go. It's a challenge for both me and the dancers to find movements that express that idea in a visual way." But it's a challenge that Helen relishes: "What I love most about the choreographic process is seeing the dancers bring an idea to life before your eyes. Plus, it's a



*Peg Deppe in costume made of tulle bitelli, a cotton mesh embellished with metal strips folded and pounded to create geometric patterns. It is often called assiut after the southern Egyptian town where it was first made in the 1920s.*

collaborative process. If I'm having trouble with a combination, there are other minds that can bring practical suggestions and fill in the gaps. That's really valuable to me."

## Did You Know...

...the Friends of Jawaahir turn on the heat in more ways than one! Who are our Friends? They are individuals who give generously to Jawaahir through financial donations or by volunteering their time and talent. Like most not-for-profit organizations, Jawaahir simply could not operate without these dedicated individuals. Their financial support pays for items both artistic (a free performance at an elementary school) and practical (turning on the heat in our dance studios in the winter). Volunteers do everything from designing our wonderful posters and flyers, stitching costumes, helping backstage, hosting guest artists in their homes, repairing our precious floors, donating items to our annual fundraiser gala, and much more.

If you'd like to become a Friend of Jawaahir, please look for your envelope in the mail (coming soon), visit us at [www.jawaahir.org](http://www.jawaahir.org), or call 612-872-6050 any morning.

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## Upcoming Events

16<sup>th</sup> Annual Henna Party  
Cassandra at Oasis Dance Camp South  
Company Choreography Show  
Cassandra's Cabaret: Valentine's Day Celebration

Jan 11  
Jan 21-25  
Feb 6-8  
Feb 14

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