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## LET'S DANCE

Tired of the same old song and dance? Workouts just not holding your interest anymore? Staying active definitely depends on the enjoyment of the task at hand, because the more fun you're having the less time you're thinking about the sweat and tears. So why not try something new that challenges and inspires you with intricate hip-twists, lively Arabic music and elaborate costumes?

The Jawaahir Dance Company on Hennepin Avenue in Minneapolis offers Middle Eastern dance classes through the Cassandra School. Middle Eastern dance is an abstract musical art form that illustrates the music; it does not necessarily tell a story. With five different levels, dancers learn everything from belly dancing—stemming from Egyptian cabaret – to folklore dances from Tunisia and Algeria. Using finger cymbals called zils, ornate costumes and emotional facial expressions, dancers learn to sculpt their movements and create live art.

“Beginning classes are geared for non-dancers, people right off the street,” says Eileen Goren from the Jawaahir Dance Company. “We have girls who start taking belly dancing at ten and women who start in their sixties. Whatever their age, everyone has a wonderful time because it touches something in them.”

Led by artistic director and Minneapolis native Cassandra Shore, the school is celebrating its thirtieth anniversary this year. No doubt its



popularity over the years with Twin Cities women is a product of its genuine approach to teaching traditional dance and how to have a great time doing it.

“It’s a woman’s dance, meant for a woman’s body, and it fits us very well,” Goren says. “Belly dancing feels comfortable no matter what size or age you are, it’s easy on your joints and it’s a great total body workout that builds strength head to toe.”

While classes are geared for all levels, belly dancing isn’t as easy as it might look.

“It’s dance, not a trick, and so you have to practice because you’re not good at it right away,” Goren explains. “In Western dance you use your torso but the isolations aren’t as specific or concentrated. When jazz dancers do a rib circle they move their entire upper body, but when belly dancers do a rib circle, we just move our rib cage.”

Getting used to the distinctive movements takes time and practice, and so does getting used to dancing to Arabic music.

“Arabic music has different rhythms and scales, and the percussion is much more important,” Goren says. “They don’t use harmony but rhythmic interplay more than melodic interplay. The basic purpose of the dance is to embody the music, to make the music come to life and help the audience see that. So you have to give yourself the space to learn as you go.”

In addition to offering four, 10-week sessions a year at the school, the Jawaahir Dance Company puts on performances throughout the year – including shows at the Southern Theater. ☒

*Photos courtesy of The Jawaahir Dance Company*