



BELEDI BEAT



A publication of Jawaahir Dance Company and The Cassandra School

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Note from Cassandra

January 25th, 2019

I can still hear the sounds of the wonderful Roula Said's passionate singing voice... "*anta omri*" and the inspired *taxims* of Michael Ibrahim....we could have performed that show another month and I would not be tired of any of it! There is no substitute for live music. Jeff Bartlett created a new look in our performing space with his excellent lighting design and execution...it's a pleasure to work with such an artist.



Post show depression – my deepest appreciation to all the Jawaahir dancers for the amazing work put in to make the show a success. These shows are a huge effort on everyone's part, and their dedication and love shows onstage, and backstage as well! Kudos to Helen Voelker for her choreography and the dedicated dancers who performed it.

And now, on to the New Year which holds so much promise for new inspirations. Watch this space for announcements about our next concert season and special performances like Roseville Parks, Eau Claire, East Lake Library which is right down the street from us, and events, including the Open Rehearsals with Ramzi and Amel. I hope to see you there!

Welcome Our Guest Artists for 2019: Ramzi and Amel

Thanks to an MRAC Arts Learning grant, the Jawaahir Dance Company will be hosting two internationally-respected dancers and choreographers, Ramzi El-Edlibi and Amel Tafout, during the months of February and March. The two visiting artists will be teaching Jawaahir new choreographies that will be performed afterward at a time to be determined on the company's performance schedule. The artists are here to inspire and instruct dancers who will be learning from these dance master's signature folkloric styles from their cultures of origin. We are pleased to introduce them to you.

Ramzi El-Edlibi

Ramzi El-Edlibi will be teaching a debke dance unique to Eastern Lebanon, working with the Company from February 15-17 with a free-to-the-public open rehearsal on the 17th. Ramzi has been doing debke all his life and said he has memorized “at least a hundred steps.” However, he had a recent epiphany about the meaning of this traditional folk dance—a line dance characterized by dancers holding hands, engaged in high energy stepping in unison. Debke is often performed at celebratory functions, including weddings.

For a long time Ramzi took debke for granted, as something that he did all his life, but rediscovered how special it is as a group dance. “It is a very attractive and magical art, and I’ve become interested again in the traditional steps even after so many years of dancing.” Ramzi will be sharing his reignited enthusiasm for debke with the dance company, and this is clearly going to be a once-in-a-lifetime experience for the dancers. Ramzi does everything with exacting verve, fluidity of movement, and showmanship. He also has a work ethic like no other.

Ramzi started dancing professionally when he was 17 years old, traveling with numerous dance companies and touring with Fayrouz, a Lebanese singer and mega-star of the Arab world. His interest in dance was cultivated by Lebanon’s thriving music and dance scene at the time. He added modern dance and ballet to his repertoire. He also created the Beirut Dance Company, but the civil war in Lebanon (1975-1991) altered his professional career, and he left the country and first went to Madrid, and later New York.



In Spain, he studied flamenco and tango, and joined a dance company that toured a Carmen production in Japan. In 1983, he moved to New York where he continued to do tango, belly dance, and other social dances in order to make a living. He bought a drum for a friend who decided he didn’t want it and started playing it himself. “So, I practiced on my own.” (When Ramzi says “practice” he means obsessive attention over many hours a day for months or years until he masters it.) This led to teaching percussion at Columbia University and joining the Columbia Arabic Music Ensemble.

Ramzi met Cassandra in Germany when they were both teaching there, and he is thrilled to be working with Jawaahir. “I am so impressed by her. When she asked me to come to Minneapolis I thought, this will be good. Her dance company has so much discipline and they do good work.”

Ramzi brings to his work an outsize love and passion for music and dance and wants that connection to be felt by the audience. “I love the sweet steps of debke—they are so delicious!”

Amel Tafsout

Thanks to an MRAC Arts Learning grant, Algerian-born dancer Amel Tafsout will be in Minneapolis March 22-24 with a free-to-the-public open rehearsal on the 24th. This charismatic and multi-faceted artist will be teaching Jawaahir Dance Company both the Guedra and Dancing to Raï music—both specific to the area of North Africa. The Guedra comes from the West Sahara originating with the Saharawi people. American audiences tend to relate this dance with the Tuareg people, a Berber tribe, who also are North African desert people, that have a similar dance called “Tindi.” Both groups wear distinctive indigo clothing that protects their skin from the sun.

Amel described the Guedra as a blessing dance traditionally performed by women, often at festivals and celebrations. It is purely beneficial and joyful. “Guedra as a term means ‘cooking pot.’ Desert people are nomads and they don’t travel with a lot of things, but they always have a cooking pot.” The guedra is covered with goat skin to make a drum.

Amongst the Saharawi as well as the Tuareg people, women are musicians and singers and men are the dancers. Traditionally the Guedra dance goes through the night, it is a solo female dance wherein a woman dances until she gets into the trance.

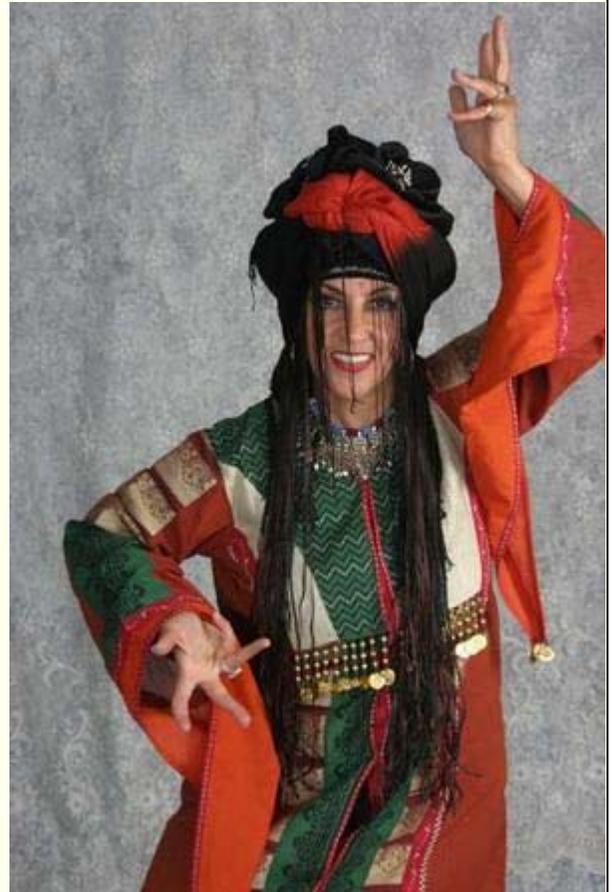
Certain things distinguish the dance, like chanting, syncopated clapping, and the eventual reveal of the dancer’s hair.

“The dance is a ritual dance; it is not a stage performance, it is a blessing dance. When the dancer is dancing she is blessing the people, the area and herself. What is important about the Guedra is what this dance is bringing to people.” Amel recognizes that performing this dance on stage is changing the dynamic. “What I want people to focus on is not costumes or steps but the energy that goes beyond staging that is a silent communication, hitting the heart, and not just the mind.”

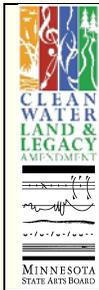
Raï music is known as the Algerian Blues, a popular musical style developed by country Bedouin musicians in the 1920s who migrated to the city of Wahran, a very cosmopolitan city in West Algeria. It gained an international audience in the 80s with an influx of musical influences, most notably from electric and electronic instruments. It is heavily improvisational and known for its lyrics of free expression. Amel will be teaching Jawaahir an Allawi-Reggada dance accompanied by a pop-Raï song called “Abdlekader,” performed at “un, deux, trois Soleils” concert by the super stars, KLhaled, Rachid Taha and Faudel. Amel had also worked with the female Raï legend Cheika Rimitti during her lifetime and was influenced by her music.

Amel said that in Algeria and also among the North African communities in France, there is a new kind of a friendly competition at weddings around music and dance. Often two dancers would compete, including one woman and one man, dancing “Allawi or Reggada.” “It’s fascinating to see it as it’s a new style emerging today.” Amel noted that dancing to Pop-Raï music is a contemporary form of dance, sometimes also used in dance battles.

In all her work as an artist, dancer and choreographer, Amel stresses that her approach is very woman-focused. “I would like to show to the West that North African women are not oppressed and that living in a circle of women



has a lot of fun and joy. There are a lot of misconceptions about us. I want people to see the strength and beauty of my culture.” she said. That’s why she appreciates working with Cassandra Shore. Amel feels that she can have confidence that her interpretation will be respected. “Cassandra is very keen to do the right thing. I trust her for that.”



This activity is made possible by the voters of Minnesota through grants from the Minnesota State Arts Board and the Metropolitan Regional Arts Council, thanks to a legislative appropriation from the arts and cultural heritage fund; Lisherness Foundation; O'Shaughnessy Foundation; Target; and friends of Jawaahir.



Upcoming Events

[Guest Artist Open Rehearsal with Ramzi El-Edlibi](#) will be held at our Jawaahir Studio, 3010 Minnehaha Ave, Minneapolis, at 3:30pm on Sunday, February 17. Thanks to an MRAC Arts Learning grant, we invite you to join us for a FREE event to meet Ramzi El Edlibi, a renowned dancer and choreographer, who is in town for an intensive workshop with Jawaahir Dance Company. This is **your** opportunity to watch him work with the Company and then pick his experienced, intelligent, and educated brain! No prior reservations needed, just show up!

[Guest Artist Open Rehearsal with Amel Tafout](#) will be held at our Jawaahir Studio, 3010 Minnehaha Ave, Minneapolis, on Sunday, March 24, time TBA. Thanks to an MRAC Arts Learning grant, we invite you to join us for a FREE event to meet Amel Tafout. This charismatic and multi-faceted artist will be holding an intensive workshop with Jawaahir Dance Company earlier in the week so that you can watch her work with the Company on Sunday, then pick her experienced, intelligent, and educated brain! No prior reservations needed, just show up!

[Caravan Under the Stars](#) Come for the auction--Stay for the glam! Cassandra and Jawaahir invite you to join us on Thursday, May 9th at 6:00pm at our Minneapolis Jawaahir Studio for an evening of celebration and gratitude of all of our treasured supporters....YOU! We welcome you to enjoy a short performance from Cassandra and Jawaahir, sample some tasty hors d'oeuvres, bid on our silent auction items bursting with amazing things, and participate in our super fun live auction. [\\$30 online reservations now](#), or you may pay \$35 admission at the door.

For further information on any of our upcoming events, check out our [new Jawaahir website!](#) You may also call 612-872-6050, or email us at admin@jawaahir.org.