



Nubian dance, Kahraman 10th anniversary concert, Aug. 2004 (Kahraman photo)

كهرمان

Kahraman Near East Dance Ensemble

Newsletter, Vol. 2, Issue 1 (October 2005)

Welcome to the new Kahraman newsletter! This issue is dedicated to exploring what Kahraman means to the many people who make up the Kahraman community: Ensemble members like our Artistic Director, Maleeha/Marie Sage, dancer Farida/Fritha Coltrain, and original company member Rya; Board members like Carol Wick, KNEDE Board President, and Shira/Julie Elliot, nationally-known expert on Arab dance and our newest addition to the KNEDE board; and dance students, like Gillian Steele and myself, Denise Filios (who is also your Kahraman newsletter editor and a board member). You will also find news--Upcoming Kahraman events!

Future issues will feature stories about the sprung floor in the new Kahraman Studios (there's a lot of history in that floor!), about other on-going projects, and about the Kahraman mission, to promote understanding and appreciation for Near East dance and culture by entertaining audiences in Iowa and beyond.

Table of Contents

Welcome, by Denise Filios, p. 1
 Letter from Maleeha, p. 2
 Through My Eyes, by Carol Wick, 3
 Daughters of Shahrazad, Shira, p. 4
 Organizing 'Shahrazad,' Denise, 5
 Lotus Blossom Festival, by Fritha, 6
 Kahraman, by Rya Dunnington, p. 7
 Dancing in Tunisia, Denise, p. 8
 Recovering from Ballet, Gillian, p. 9
 Kahraman Board of Directors, 9
 Upcoming Events, p. 9



Shikaat dance, Daughters of Shahrazad, March 2005 (WRAC photo)

Letter from the Artistic Director

يا عيوني!
Ya Ayouni! (Oh! Your Eyes!)

Dear Friends:

The arts, like life, take a lot of consistent



attention (work!) to create memories out of dreams. Kahraman, now in its eleventh year, has a lot more dreams to fulfill, but it is memories of times with you that encourage us.

It is my sincere hope that

those of you who come to Kahraman events have taken away with you memories of moments that live inside you, whether it be the remembrance of the swirl of a skirt, dancers backlit by stage lighting, or perhaps the grace note of a hand lovingly shaping the space inside the music.

Some of you have taken time to share your memories with me – thank you! But it is just as crucial to me to share with you the memories that live deep inside of me after the costume is hung up and the dance space is in darkness. And, perhaps surprisingly, it is not your hands in applause that first come to my mind. It is hands sewing costumes, painting studios and set pieces, baking lovely edibles, and writing donation checks and notes of encouragement; hands that I will long remember with deep appreciation.

Overwhelmingly, though, it is your eyes (yes, I do see YOU out there!) that I remember. It is our precious, shared gaze during performance that comes back to me in my sleep. These mutual, fleeting glances are, for me, the heart of this unique art form. Our shared glances are the human force that pulls me to you as I dance, the force that pulls us as a dance company further into both the culture and the art that it comes from.

So it is with gratitude that this first newsletter is dedicated to all of you who are a part of our past and our future.

عای دلعونا! Ala Dalouna! (On Your Sweet Eyes!)

Maleeha
Marie Sage- Artistic Director
Kahraman Near East Dance Ensemble



Salaam Band (Dena El Saffar, Hakan Toker, Tim Moore), Daughters of Shahrazad, March 2005 (Shira photo)

Carol Wick
President, KNEDE Board of Directors

Through the eyes of a KNEDE Board Member

I began taking Modern and Arabic Dance classes from Marie in the summer of 1996. I practiced many forms of dance including ballet, tap, toe, jazz and modern throughout my childhood and college years because of my love to move with music. For years I had been looking for a dance form that was easier on my body and I finally found it! Marie's classes are genuinely entertaining and educational. I like how she gives her students suggestions for improvement with enthusiasm and honesty.

I soon got involved with the "haflas", yet I wanted to do more. Marie invited me to join the Board of Directors in the winter of 1997. What does the Board of Directors do? We do some of the administrative tasks so the dance company and studio can focus on their business: presentations and performances. We also assist in raising funds to help support the company. I have held many positions on the board and learned a great deal about running a dance company and studio.

Over the years I have enjoyed witnessing the growth of the company and its wonderful dancers. The respect they have for Marie and

her ability to choreograph new works with them in mind is very enriching for all involved. I have traveled to Milwaukee, South Bend, Seattle, New York, Madison, Chicago, Cedar Rapids, Kalamazoo, and recently Wichita and Dallas for workshops and performances that make me proud to be a part of the group. This past spring I worked with Marie and other women in the community to put on a conference in partnership with the UI Women's Resource and Action Center. It gave me insight into working with people of all walks of life that has been very helpful to me in my own endeavors.

With the help of my dance family, I have learned a great deal about myself, and I get the strength to continue to grow and become a better person. I feel quite fortunate to have been able to be a part of the board of directors all these years and hope that when my time to leave the board comes, that I can continue to be involved as an advisory board member. I want to continue to invest my time and energy with Kahraman because of the inspiring work they do in spreading knowledge about the Near East through their dance and to be a part of this wonderful dance family.



Village Dance, Kahraman 10th anniversary concert, August 2004 (Kahraman photo)



Daughters of Shahrazad: Face to Face

Cultural Encounters Through the Expressive Arts of Middle Eastern Women

by Shira/Julie Elliot

On March 5, 2005, Kahraman Near East Dance Ensemble, in collaboration with the University of Iowa Women's Resource and Action Center and with funding from the Year of the Arts and Humanities, presented a unique one-day conference called Daughters of Shahrazad: Face to Face. This event offered a selection of workshops on topics celebrating the creativity of women from the Middle East and North Africa, including cooking, textile arts, music, dance, folk tales, and more. It also featured opportunities for attendees to talk with women from these regions and ask questions about their cultural experiences.

In my 24 years of being part of the Middle Eastern dance community, I have never before seen a dancer put together this type of event, focused on cultural exchange rather than on movement. In fact, most "belly dance teachers" I have known over the years just teach steps and have minimal knowledge of the cultures the dance comes from. As a result, the students receive only a partial education, making them unqualified to transmit the dance appropriately when they themselves move on to teach and perform. In contrast, Kahraman's innovative conference provided an educational opportunity for not only students of Near Eastern dance but also members of the public on several facets of the cultures these dances come from.

I wish every student of dances from this region could attend an event like this to enrich their overall understanding of their art form.

Read Shira's complete report on Daughters of Shahrazad (with lots more pictures!) at:
<http://www.gildedserpent.com/art30/Shiraconfdtrshrzd.htm>

Also check out Shira's website, a great source of info about Near East Dance: www.shira.net



Robyn Friend performing a Persian dance, Daughters of Shahrazad, March 2005, Monia Hejaiej and Dena El Saffar
(Women's Resource and Action Center photos)

Denise Filios, Assoc. Prof., Spanish
University of Iowa

Daughters of Shahrazad: A Nine-Month Labor of Love

In Spring 2004, UI President David Skorton announced the UI Year of the Arts and Humanities, providing monies for community-centered art events. One day in April I was in dance class, warming up, when it occurred to me: I'd love to do something with Marie and get some of that money for Kahraman! Marie said, oh, I know Linda Kroon, of the Women's Resource and Action Center (WRAC) would love that too, and Daughters of Shahrazad was born! Quickly I wrote the grant application and submitted it along with Linda, and when we heard we'd gotten it (and one of the biggest YAH grants of all), I was happy and overwhelmed--I'd never organized an arts conference before! But Kahraman had.

Carol and Marie spent hours with me working out the details of budget, what, who, where. Marie contracted Robyn Friend, an expert in Persian dance and culture, and Kahraman's frequent collaborator Salaam Band. I brought in Monia Hejaiej, a professor at the University of Tunis and a specialist in Arab women's culture. Linda brought WRAC's enormous resources and experience, staffing and design expertise, and over thirty years' work within Iowa City.

Soon we four multiplied, as Gulcin Aydin and Kats Mendoza (UI grad students), Katie Hansen and Dorothy Paul of the Iowa UN Association, and Laurie Haag (WRAC design maven and photographer), joined in our organizational meetings--the more, the merrier! And the more hands to make this dream a reality!

Marie, Linda, Carol, and I first met in May 2004; we got the grant approval in July; August we began working in earnest; by December almost all the ducks were in a row. The day-long arts conference took place on Saturday, March 5, 2005, in the Old Brick in Iowa City, and it was a smashing success!

Daughters of Shahrazad was sponsored by WRAC, Kahraman, and YAH, with additional support from the Dept. of Spanish and Portuguese and International Program. Fareway and Hy-Vee donated refreshment, while UI and Kahraman dance students volunteered in droves to make sure everything ran smoothly. Daughters of Shahrazad was truly a community event that educated and entertained Iowans and Midwesterners from all walks of life--and one of the most fulfilling experiences I've ever had!



Linda Kroon of WRAC



Kahraman and Salaam, Dance of the Gulf Women (WRAC photos)

A Working Dancer's view of the Lotus Blossoms Festival and Salaam's Gala

Fritha Coltrain (aka Farida)

It was a dark and stormy night as the Kahraman caravan pulled into the hotel. Having sat in the car for nearly 6 hours, the 5 minutes waiting for room keys seemed like hours. The rooms assigned, the dancers scrambled to unload the car of costumes, props, travel bags, ironing boards and irons. Between the mayhem of unloading and the odd placement of a handicap access ramp, a dancer twisted her ankle and fell. We were due for rehearsal within minutes and, as the Kahraman dancers know, there is no whining. Ok, maybe just a little.



What a beginning to a long weekend of working at dance! The Lotus Blossom Festival was a two-day educational event in Indiana, with Kahraman and Salaam performing for school children. Each day we did two 20-30 minute performances. The shows themselves were not physically demanding. However, load in, tech, costume changes, the energy shared with the audience, and the unpredictability of live music only hinted at the challenges we'd face on the third day.

After two days with school children, Kahraman, Salaam, and a host of guest artists descended upon Bloomington's Buskirk-Chumley Theatre. First we had to lay the Marley, the temporary dance floor that now resides in the new studio. The night before, road-weary dancers unrolled it to let the Marley flatten. By 8 or 9 am, all dancers were there, skooching and stretching the Marley for taping, a camaraderie-building exercise that entails a team of dancers, arms linked and skooching as one across the floor. Teams with tape trail after the chugging skoochers, attempting to capture the elusive, perfectly-flat temporary dance floor. Then the musicians moved in to begin the sound tech and Marie got to the job of lighting. Dancers waited to be called for brief spacing of dances on the stage. A full run-through with music would have been lovely, but time was marching on. By noon we were heading for a quick bite, water, ironing and makeup.

As it turned out, the matinee was our dress rehearsal. It was a small house, mostly by families and school children,. The music went pretty well for the dancers and the audience was appreciative at all the right moments. Afterwards, technical problems were tended to while we had a late lunch with more water. A local yoga/meditation studio was offered as a quiet place to rest before the evening show. Dancers and musicians alike quickly lined the walls. At first, with the excitement of performing, it was hard to settle down. Slowly my mind calmed and disappeared, only to be disturbed by the sound of an elegant dancer snoring like a chain saw. Reviving was a challenge, but the evening show loomed like our own version of the Olympics.

The images are like stills in my mind: shower, hair, other Kahraman dancers, makeup, ironing, the singer and her stories, a wise crack here and a ruffling of feathers there. Before we knew it, we were in wigs and costumes on stage. Everyone was beaming as hair swooshed in the Gulf Dance. Next, Marie entranced and conjured delight for the audience. John turned as the universe turns and we all turned a new leaf with him. Then... there was the Lebanese number. As usual, the village girls picked on the old Uncle playing his Oud, the village came to watch and join in the debke, and we all danced and played as if it were the first time anyone had danced to this song. Of course, the first time Kahraman did the debke with Salaam playing live, it was a ride to remember. At one point the lovely singer was headed into yet another verse like a wave headed for the ocean. The band pulled, the dancers pulled ... time seemed to stop as we all looked for the safety of the chorus.

The joy of performing to live music is the reality of collaborating with so many people...The joy of performing with Kahraman is not only working with other artists and dancers, but also traveling to share our delight with so many different audiences. The work is in showing up, putting on the show and taking it back down so that we can rest and visit with friends. The memories, visions, mystery, knowledge and joy we share are priceless.

Kahraman. What it means to me... by Rya Dunnington, former company dancer

Hours driving around the Midwest...bickering over who had to sit in the middle seat and who was chewing their gum too loudly. Opportunity for deep conversations, surprise musical finds, worldly advice, dance ideas (car zar) and costume inspirations (periwinkle skies over golden fields of corn).

Night upon night spent in hotel rooms or on fellow dancer's floors surrounded by four, six, eight, ten companions. Discovering who was a compatible bedmate, how to line up shower rotations, and who would inevitably forget makeup or costuming items.

REAL group problem solving...broken down cars outside of Peoria, costumes left behind, dropped props, wind, dancers running through the crowd as the opening music began, finding a cab in Long Island City, group numbers performed to live music that threw in an extra chorus, costumes that broke either on-stage or during the ninety seconds allotted for changing between dances.

Hours spent locating, cutting, sewing and decorating beautiful fabrics...surrounded by a dozen aspiring Nubians and yards of cotton cloth in bright sunflower, turquoise, cranberry, salmon, palm and eggplant. Poring over treasures of intricate white trim brought back from New York. Carrying a shimmybelt, payettes, needles and thread to classes and work, hoping for a spare five minutes here and there to finish a costume in time for that evening's performance.

The fulfillment of a childhood wish...realizing during a two week residency performing multiple shows daily for Indiana schoolchildren that years ago I had sat in the audience on special fieldtrips captivated by performers on a stage and I had fervently wished in my heart that someday I would be on such a stage. Feeling the wonder and joy at coming full circle and providing for others what had so inspired me.

The support and encouragement to follow a dream ... scraping together the money to study in New York for a week, glowing from the intensity of dancing seven hours daily in the July heat, pushing ourselves to take advantage of every rich cultural offering pursuable, being rewarded not only by my growth as a dancer, but also by the start of my eleven year romance with my husband.

Learning to truly trust my fellow dancers and finding the joy of acceptance in a group where people have seen you at your best and your worst. Being reunited with dancers after years apart and feeling the comfort from recognizing in each other the familiar habits one never sees in one's self and being inspired by each other's substantial growth and life accomplishments.

I am so proud and honored to have been a part of Kahraman, and in my heart I am still dancing at every performance and traveling every mile. I am deeply grateful that Kahraman is a part of me, and will always be so. Kahraman has influenced so much in my life...from the mundane to the extraordinary. I will be ever grateful for all that Kahraman means to me...

Congratulations and a big zaghareet to Marie, all of you current Kahraman dancers and board members. With much love, Rya



What Kahraman means to me, by Denise Filios

I first learned of Maleeha and of Kahraman Near East Dance Ensemble through an ad in the Daily Iowan. One day in fall 2003, I was flipping through the DI, and this photo caught my eye: Near East Dance Classes! Taught by Maleeha! In Iowa City!! Where do I sign up???

To me, Near East dance is about women’s sociability--women, dancing together, teaching each other how to dance, sharing the joy of music and movement, all in a safe space. I learned about the pleasures of Arab dance when I was in Tunis, working on a research project with Monia Hejaiej, who visited Iowa City last spring as a featured artist for “Daughters of Shahrazad.”

In Tunis Monia would throw parties and invite all the professors in the English dept--well, not all--just the women. We would gather in Monia’s living room, sitting on pillows on the floor, sipping mint tea, talking, and laughing. We’d start with the sweet pastries--baklava, napoleans, mini tarts--then move on to the savory ones--mini quiches, feta squares, shrimp puffs--washed down with water or tea. The sobriety of Arab Muslim culture in no way reduces the fun of parties. When you’re not drunk, you can seriously dance.

And everyone did! Monia would put on her favorite CDs and start, and everyone would join in. A circle would form around someone, and she’d lead for a while, and then bring someone else into the center as she stepped into the ring--and we’d keep going. Everyone had their own style--an athlete danced strong and fast; a quiet woman danced with subtle, small movements; a younger one danced just with her hips, fast; an older one, slowly, with elegant arm movements. Everyone was beautiful, happy, and dancing, enjoying the simple pleasure of watching other women, learning new moves, being a bit daring (they enjoyed teaching the American how to dance like a ‘bad girl’), even imitating how men

dance. Without men. In a safe and secure space.

Through Maleeha’s classes I can recapture the pleasures of North African women’s culture here in Iowa City. The community formed within each class is a bit different but always supportive, joyful, and centered on Near East dance. Through dance, we celebrate our bodies, challenging ourselves physically and encouraging each other when we feel a bit frustrated. Through dance, we create a safe space that I look forward to, each week, to help keep me sane.



Dancing without men at Daughters of Shahrazad:
Monia Hejaiej, Carol Wick, Denise Filios (WRAC photo)

What Kahraman means to me, by Gillian Steele, Kahraman student dancer

Several years ago, when I came to my very first dance class with Maleeha, right away, something clicked. I had been struggling to fit into and feel good about myself in ballet for many years. I loved the dance and I loved to watch it, but having started SO late in life decreased my chances of really enjoying it.



Ballet dancers normally start in very early childhood (by the age of 8 or 9 preferably), and I walked into the studio for the first time at the age of 15. I was not a normal student by any means and couldn't take classes at the really nice ballet school nearby. My choice of teachers and classes was quite limited. Happily, I settled into a class filled with children half my age and sort of played the role of mother hen. I watched those little girls grow up

and become quite good dancers, but I was often forgotten in the midst of things. Photographs, performances, and class convinced me that I really was too old to be doing this. The pressures of high school and impending college decisions squelched most of my dream to pursue ballet further.

When I walked into Maleeha's classroom, all those not so neat and tidy ballet experiences washed away. It didn't seem as if anyone was bringing any baggage into the classroom. The music was easy to relate to and so were the movements. I felt like I had finally found a little niche in the dance world.

The weekly dance classes have turned out to be much more than a good workout for me. The birth of my daughter went smoothly, and the pregnancy too; I believe it is because dancing had prepared me to listen to my own body even if no one else did.

Since the birth, weekly class is the one place where I get to go and not be a student *and* a housewife *and* a mother. I can disconnect myself from those pieces of my life. Then for an hour or so each week I can be like the little girl I remember who spent endless hours making up and performing dances in the garage of her parents' house. Dance class means so many things to me.



Photo of Gillian and Sofia is a Steele family photo; inset of Sofia at Daughters of Shahrazad is a WRAC photo.

Kahraman Board of Directors

Carol Wick, President
Marie Sage, Artistic Director
John Cowan
Fritha Coltrain
Julie Elliot
Margie Figgins
Denise Filios
Gary Holmquist
Erin Minne
Valerie Smith
Martha Stewart
Brian Wilkes

Upcoming Events

Saturday, October 22, 2005
"Spoofla," 7:00 p.m., Kahraman Studio
Food, Fun, and Student Performances!
\$10 advance, \$12 at door

Saturday, Nov. 19, 2005
Eva Cernik Turkish Orientale
Workshop and Show
Old Brick, 26 E Market St., Iowa City
\$60 advance, \$70 at door
Registration form: www.kahramandance.org

Saturday, July 29, 2006
Mahmoud Reda
More information Soon!