Soul Dance Newsletter

Volume 8 – December 2011

AHLAN WA SAHLAN

As I write this, I am also in the process of making a list of things to pack for the upcoming Soul of Egypt Tour. After much deliberating and discussions with my friends in Cairo, I have decided to go ahead with the tour much to the relief of those ladies who have signed up!

I am eagerly awaiting the opportunity to get to Egypt so that I can report back, first hand, on what it is like post-revolution and post-election (first round anyway). The election process will continue for a couple of months into next year. In the first truly free, democratic election for some 30 plus years, it looks like the Islamic political parties will be increasing their stamp on Egyptian society.

I have admired the Egyptian people so much over the last year in their determination to peacefully overthrow the old, corrupt regime and usher in democracy. Many did lose their lives and their health as a result of clashes (the regime did not go without a fight) and I am sure you will all join with me in hoping that this was not in vain – that the new government can bring about a better life for all Egyptians. I do have concerns about the future of the arts (including dance and music) in Egypt as the hardline Islamists (not all Islamists) traditionally frown upon such things – but that's another story.

I am also looking back at what has been another amazing year at Souldance. How is it possible that, after a decade, things are still getting better and better?

This year's Abbey Festival was so wonderful this year with our own, permanent 'forest glade' to call our own. So many tribe members were inspired to come to me with ideas and plans for implementing next year! I have a meeting with the Abbey organisers before Christmas to discuss some exciting plans for next year! This year also saw the upgrade of our annual hafla to "Gala". There were small touches to give it some extra pizazz and I am hoping to add more and more over the next several years to make it truly the Queensland 'night of nights' for bellydance.

This year we have also welcomed Marlene Faisal as a SoulDance teacher and debuted her new Folkloric troupe; JEZOOR (which means 'roots'). It has been really lovely being part of her passion and vision for the old-style, Reda theatrical style of folkloric Egyptian dance. There are some very exciting plans for the group in 2012. She will write more about Jezoor in this newsletter.

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Soul Dance became part of the Sydney Middle Eastern Dance Festival for the first time in 2011 too! More about that later.

At this point I would like to mention all the wonderful friends who help make Soul Dance what it is. Things like John Hunter managing the backdrop curtain at the Gala, and the Leam's son, Aylard doing spotlight duties…….it's the little things like this that contribute to a whole. I thank each and every one of you.

Special thanks to a very special woman, without whom my life would not be the same; Helen Hampton. I feel blessed to call Helen friend let alone have her as a Soul Dance teacher. I would say she is the wind beneath my wings but that's not her style….she is more a gentle breeze, always there bringing comfort and assurance; providing just enough thought and encouragement to ensure my sails are never slack and making me look good. On behalf of all of us at the school who reap the rewards of having you in our midst, Helen, thank you for sharing with us your beautiful soul.

I wish everyone a fun Christmas and hopeful New Year! Margaret xxxxxx

Sydney Middle Eastern Dance Festival

This year Soul Dance brought Turkish Gypsy Dance to the national festival in Sydney. The Gypsy Soul Dance Troupe (Shelley, Diana, Kristy, Sara, Katie, Marilyn and myself) performed a smoking 9/8 choreography to the old classic "Rompi Rompi" at the huge concert night. Most of you would have also seen this performance at the Gala.

I also taught a workshop in this rare and unusual style. The workshop was very well attended and the students requested I return next year to teach more which I am indeed doing.

It was a fun road-trip for our troupe and we also had the company of some other Soul Dancers who attended the festival .

It is a great weekend away and I encourage you to try it one of these years. Treat it as the ultimate girls weekend – some of the troupe actually spent more time at the shops and getting manicures than at the festival. Oh well, you get that :)

You can read more about the festival here;- www.sydmedfest.com/

AN ARABIAN NIGHT: 1001 BELLYDANCE DREAMS GALA

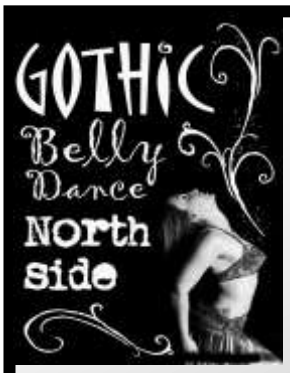
What an amazing night! It seems the very word "Gala" provided dancers from all over with added inspiration to go the extra mile – not just from our school but from sister schools as far away as Maryborough! I wanted to 'upgrade' our hafla, as I believe our dance form truly deserves a glittering and professional forum in which to shine. With the announcement this year that the Extravaganza was to be no more, I guess this was a knee-jerk reaction on my part. It is one that I am sure glad of as I think it was a wonderful night and the feedback has been very encouraging. It was a lot of work to put on but, once again, with your help we can do great things together. Incidentally, the Extravaganza is 'back on' (mid August I believe).

The highlight of the Gala for me personally was the performance of Desert Rose. I wanted this dance to depict the blossoming of women after they discover bellydancing. From Bedouin to Blossom, from seed to flower, from hidden to revealed, from closed to open, from sharp to soft, from mono-chromatic to vivid colour, from woman to bellydancer!!!!

Well, on the surface it certainly depicted all this. What had the tears rolling down my face was the deeper significance of this dance. In 5 minutes I saw my own journey unfold on the stage and I saw the journey of so many of you unfolding too. From my current beginners to my most seasoned student, you were all up there having your story told.

From a creative/artist point of view I have never felt so fulfilled and humbled at the same time; humbled by a gift that my students gave back to me, in the audience. It was like I painted a picture that you only revealed to me then and there. The dancers were the paints without which this piece could never have come to life. I thank you all for trusting blindly in me and each doing your little bit to create a truly overwhelming and profound whole. Do you get the impression I was a tad moved by the whole thing? :)

Margaret xxx



Our Gothic troupe was pretty stoked with our elfish offering at this year's Gala.

For those of you who may have missed the introduction to the act, the song, Schwarzelbenheim, was about a race of dark elves who live in the depths of the earth and mine precious metal ore with which they forge magical weaponry. That's the gist anyway. So there you go, that explains the elf ears.

We had soooo much fun putting this one together.

I am pretty chuffed to be working with this particular group of dancers. They are so clever that they can handle anything I throw at them and they have such ghoulish enthusiasm for the weird and wacky – I really feel anything is possible with La Boheme.

Looking forward to next year and the outlandish things we will no doubt dabble in!

Margaret x

Outi is originally from Finland and now works as a professional dancer in Cairo. Here is her take on fashion trends in Cairo….
For more articles, check out her website www.outiofcairo.com

Fashion in Islamic terms

In the eyes of an outsider the process of Egyptian women getting dressed may seem very simple and straightforward. All-covering cloaks and scarves in theory are to direct the viewer's thoughts away from the gutter and give all women a similar appearance. All the while they make the mornings easier, you don't need to do your hair either. However, the truth is far from this initial assumption. Appearance is really important and Egyptian women and girls love to look pretty.

Outside home the attire of muslim women can be divided into three rough categories. The combination of galabeya and higab, which leaves the face uncovered, is the most common outfit. The most religious ones will wear a niqab, which covers almost the entire face, in addition to the galabeya. The eyes are uncovered or there may be a piece of thin chiffon or mesh in front of them. Young women in the city tend to wear even tight clothing like their Western sisters. The first two attires have existed for a long time. The jeans and higab on young women is a complete newcomer. That's why I will focus mainly on the introduction of the last mentioned fashion.

Traditionally

In addition to the lower and middle class women in the city, the womenfolk in the countryside mostly wear galabeyas. The woman's marital status and age also affect their choices in clothing. The husband's opinion may change the wardrobe of a young lady rather soon after the wedding. As women get older they often put on the galabeya. The galabeya and all that goes with it is affordable and ineffected by any fashion trends.

Mostly the color of the galabeya is black. Other dark colors are a close second. Dark green, blue and burgundy creatures are everywhere. Galabeyas are decorated with stiches, borders and appliques at the hem and sleeves. Sometimes the front side is fully decorated with beadwork or ribbon. Usually the higab and other accessories are chosen to match the decoration of the galabeya. A dark fabric can be accompanied by a very bright colored scarf. Traditional women dress in all black.

Interestingly enough, advertisements generally use two different types of women. A big part of them are advertising food articles - oil, butter, cheese - or detergents and cleaning chemicals. These products belong in women's world. Trendy and educated 'modern mothers' are dressed in higabs and galabeyas in soft colors, traditional mothers entirely in black.

Skin Tight

A few decades ago the higab didn't have the sort of presence on the street as it does today. As the Islamic ideals have gained more ground in recent years, the landscape of Cairo has transformed as well. In the 80's higab-less heads and flowing hair were still a common sight. Nowadays most women without headscarf are Christian. The higab has become more of a habit or custom, rather than a proclamation of religious piety. This has created an interesting combination.

Young women have adopted influences from Western fashion and pair it with Islamic practices. Formfitting shirts and tight jeans were previously not acceptable when worn with higab. At the moment bare skin is considered inappropriate. Only the hands up until the wrists and the face are appropriate to reveal in public. The extent of cleavage and length of sleeves are critical. Layering is common practice. Little tops are worn on top of tight, long sleeved shirts.

Some shirts come with fake double sleeves and collars. This creates the illusion of two tops worn at once. The current fashion has created some necessary new accessories!!! There are separate sleeves, which are of stocking-like material. The can be worn with any top with short sleeves. There is also the equivalent for the midriff. If the pants ride too low and the slightly too-short top are in danger of revealing bare skin, this 'belt' solves the problem. It's also made of a stretchy material, and covers the entire stomach from below where the pants end all the way to the bra.

Color Does Matter

Egyptians love colors. They are crucial in clothing. Women combine different colors without prejudice. Usually an outfit utilizes two main colors. The entity is designed around this colorscheme. I am so Caironized these days that few combinations startle me: pink and khaki - cute and modern, orange and purple - nice and spunky, brown and lime - what a refreshing combo. Women are very specific with every detail. The shirt, the skirt - or pants, the headscarf - or scarves, the shoes, the purse, the jewellery, possible sleeves and the pins securing the higab are all carefully coordinated. One headscarf has been replaced by an arrangement of many different scarves. Young women want to put their skill on display and wear a complex work of art created with even three scarves, each in a different color.

One time when exiting the subway I saw a middle-aged woman standing on the street, apparently just waiting for someone. She was dressed in a dark pant suit. The higab, the purse and other accessories were bright turquoise. The woman seemed very proud of her appearance and everything was indeed well put together - even the turquoise shib shib (shoes), which were two sizes too small. I couldn't even imagine walking in shoes that left an inch of my heels hanging outside.

Mine, Yours, Ours

Egyptians own everything collectively. Being cheap is a vice, and among family borrowing is an everyday thing. It's good to ask the owner's permission, but often it's forgotten, sometimes in purpose. Many Egyptians don't have as many belongings as we do in the West. There just isn't as much money to spend, although things are cheaper than in our neighborhoods. The wardrobe of the whole family often fits into one or two closets and everyone gets what they need from there. By borrowing the women can create several different outfits. Sometimes the scarf belongs to the older sister, the purse to mom and the skirt to a cousin. Skirt, pant and shirt sizes aren't too important. A pair of pants that's too big can quickly be stiched up and made a couple of inches smaller at the waist and the hips. Skirts that are too long can be rolled up at the waist. Clothes which are too small will slowly stretch out to the misfortune of the original owner.

Inside the Makeup Bag

And last, but not least, is the face. It took me time to learn and to understand how Egyptian women do their makeup. They put it on in much heavier amounts and it is precisely matched with the color of the clothes. Where I'm from their eye makeup would be suitable for a night out, there is plenty of eyeliner and enough glitter to share. Lips are clearly exaggerated. In my opinion it is at times over the top. From the front the lipliner might still look good, but from the side it's outrageous. The lipstick is much lighter than the lipliner. This look was fashionable in the West some ten years ago. The strangest detail in the makeup has to do with blush. It's also applied on the tip of the nose. Doing this of course creates an illusion of a smaller nose and whiter skin around the eyes. It basically brings out the eyes. To me it just resembles a drunk person, since those who drink a lot tend to develop a red nose.

Fancy clothes are for the ugly

My grandfather used this expression that he learned from his own mother whenever he saw me put on makeup. Sometimes I did my nails on purpose when visiting my grandparents. This is clearly not an Arabic proverb. In Egypt it is a virtue to do yourself up, as long as it is done within certain boundaries.

MONDAY NIGHT WHISPERINGS – Gamila Ruh

by Helen

We have enjoyed some fun times in our Monday night classes this year. Once again I thank the lovely ladies of Gamila Ruh for their love, support and commitment throughout. On more than one occasion I have been very thankful for the healing power of inspiring women and beautiful music to lift and carry me during those "bumpy" times when stress can get the upper hand!!

My highlight this year was our rather gorgeous Khaleegy choreography (please see attached article for further information on Khaleegy style). It was a goal I had set myself for 2011 and it ticked all of the boxes.....feminine, spiritual, colourful and fun. My heartfelt thanks to all for opening their hearts and minds to this beautiful dance style.

Another facet we were able to explore with our Khaleegy choreography was the power of colour. So many beautiful, vibrant coloured dresses to choose from and each evoking a different feeling within. I encouraged the ladies to think carefully about the colour they wanted to be enveloped in and suggested trying on different colours to see how each made them feel. I am quite confident that each lady felt a million dollars when they stepped out onto the stage at our Gala Night. Keti Sharif provides an interesting insight into this topic on her website *type in "Keti Sharif Colours and Chakras" into your search engine to read more!!

Happy holidays to everyone at Soul Dance and I look forward to returning in 2012 with more fun and challenging classes.

Cathryn (Gamila Ruh) –
Our Very Own Khaleegy Incense Goddess

**"A woman does not hear sound only through the ears;
she hears sound through every pore of her body.
It permeates the entire being,
and according to its particular influence either slows
or quickens the rhythm of the blood circulation;
it either wakens or soothes the nervous system.
It arouses a person to greater passions
or it calms her by bringing her peace.
According to the sound and its influence
a certain effect is produced.
Sound becomes visible in the form of radiance.
This shows that the same energy which goes into the form of sound
before being visible is absorbed by the physical body.
In that way the physical body recuperates
and becomes charged with new magnetism."**

~ from 'Mysticism of Sound' by Hazrat Inayat Khan ~

Khaleegy (aka Saudi, Gulf, Raks Nasha'at)

Pronounced Kuh-**LEE**-jee. (for extra pronunciation points, start with a phlegmy coughing sound). Would be pronounced with a hard G sound in the Egyptian dialet. Alternate spellings: Khaliji, Khaleeji, Khaleegi

What is it?

A folkloric dance from the Persian Gulf region (in Arabic, this region is called the Khaleej)-- there are versions performed in Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, United Arab Emirates. and Saudi Arabia. Each country and region has its own style -- in the US we typically see Saudi or Kuwaiti styles, or several styles blended together into a single presentation. Most American dancers don't have a deep understanding of the variations but know Khaleegy as a collection of Gulf dances.

You'll recognize this dance when you see it by the embellished caftan-like costume that's worn (more on that below), the limpy gliding steps, head slides and various hair tosses.

What is its name?

It's difficult to know what to call this dance. Calling it Khaleegy dance is inaccurate, because there are many styles of dance in the region, mostly done by men (often with sabres or rifle twirling!). The women's dance can have different names in different countries (Samri in Kuwait, *Raks Nasha'at* or 'Hair Dance' in UAE). I'll use Khaleegy for this article because it's the name most teachers and dancers in the U.S. use. I also hear it called 'Saudi' which is a little inaccurate since it covers a much wider area than just Saudi Arabia.

Why do we learn it?

Khaleegy dances are NOT bellydance, although there is some overlap in the movement vocabulary and the audiences. So why do we learn Khaleegy dancing?

1. **It comes up in our music.** Dancers in Cairo and other Middle Eastern hot spots often include some Khaleegy dancing in their sets to put the wealthy Arab tourists in a generous tipping mood. As a result, many pieces of music used by bellydancers have Khaleegy sections in them. If a dancer with a knowledgeable audience dances right over that music without including some Khaleegy steps, it's almost as if the Macarena played and the dancer ignored it. Does the world end if you don't recognize some Khaleegy music that comes up in your set? Of course not. But if you do dance to it appropriately you'll look much more knowledgeable -- and could pick up extra tips from any wealthy Gulf Arabs who happen to be in your audience!

2. **It's really, really, really fun to do.** The rhythms are catchy and pull you in, the dance steps are mostly simple and easy to learn, and there's a unique joy and relaxation in the dance.

3. **It's pretty.** There's a subtle feminine beauty to the movements (not to mention the shiny costumes!) that you might miss at first glance, especially if you've only seen the dance done by students who haven't relaxed into the movements or gotten the music into their hearts.

Khaleegy (continued)

The costume

The gloriously decorated dress is called a *Thobe al Nasha'al* (*Thobe* rhymes with robe). It's often just referred to as a *Thobe*, but that word only means 'dress' in Arabic and can even refer to the men's long shirt-like garment.

Asking for a *Saudi Thobe* or *Khaleegy dress* will get you the right garment from any bellydance vendor, though. Since you can plainly see what the costume looks like in the video clips, I won't waste a lot of words describing it. It's not absolutely necessary to wear the Thobe Nasha'ar to perform Khaleegy dance, but for stage performances in the U.S. it is typical.

How does this dance fit into Khaleegy culture?

Women do this dance amongst themselves at parties. Suppose you're at a wedding party in one of the Gulf countries. The women's party may be separate from the men -- or at the very least at opposite ends of the hall (depends on the country and social climate of the times). All the women will be wearing lovely party dresses, and at one time they would have brought thobes from home to slip over their dresses for dancing (the thobes aren't really worn any more, although they're still popular with Western women when dancing this style). When it was time for the dancing, it might happen in several ways, depending on the size, formality, and location of the gathering. The women may play drums, sing, and do syncopated clapping together while other women get up to dance a few at a time.

Or the women may dance in neat lines, crossing and passing each other:

It's also done in livelier style to pop music.

How is the dance done?

Because the region includes a variety of cultures and tribes and roots, there are a variety of styles. Saudi dancing is different from Iraqi dancing, for instance. Some are lighter and bouncier, some heavier. There are only a few dancers and teachers who fully understand all the regional variations, and that's OK. It's just important to understand that just because a dancer isn't doing it exactly how you learned doesn't mean she's wrong. Sometimes we dancers rush to judgment when we should be asking questions.

The most basic movement of the dance is a limpy step with one foot flat and the other on the ball. This step might glide the dancer along sideways or alternate RLR pause, LRL pause. The body is very relaxed, hips are allowed to push back when lifting onto the ball of the foot.

Other very standard movements include head slides and circles, shoulder (not bust) shimmies, hand gestures, manipulating the thobe with the hands, and tossing the hair side to side, in circles, or in figure 8s (often while kneeling).

This dance is about showing off the thobe, hair and eyes. Traditionally the thobe would be covered in jewels and gold thread and is made purposefully long (over a foot of fabric will pile on the floor). The dress length is a statement of wealth as it suggests that the women wearing them do not need their hands for anything other than holding and moving the thobe.

Changes to Class Fees Payment System next year

Many of you may not be aware that we have come close to losing the studio this year, as I have been struggling to meet the rental payments. I understand it has been a financially difficult year for everyone! I have considered the option of going back to teaching out of a hall but I really would hate to do this. I also don't want to raise the class fee again at this point. As a trial, to see if it makes things a little better, I am going to try what other dance schools do, the "Term Payment" method. This just means the class fees for the term are paid as one sum at the beginning of each term. With this method you are still free to miss classes if you have to, with the opportunity to make up the missed class at other classes during the week or at special 'make-up-classes' which I will hold at the end of each term so you will still get your full money's worth. The benefit for the studio is that I can be assured of a weekly amount that will sustain the studio costs rather than risk some weeks with very low attendance and therefore not meeting the rent.

There will still be a pay-as-you-go option of $16 per class for those who know they can only make it occasionally. Now is an opportune time to let you know, so you can keep putting away your weekly $14 over the Christmas break to avoid the "lump sum" blues come the beginning of next term.

As usual, I insist that if you are experiencing financial hardship you speak to me – it would simply break my heart to think of any one of you missing out on bellydancing because of money issues!!!! I can arrange with you to make two smaller payments rather than the one for example or negotiate a lower fee until you are back on your feet. Please don't feel embarrassed – I'll have you know I also take up offers like this in other areas of my own life so the least I can do is offer similar understanding to my own students.

I will let you know the nuts and bolts of this new method before the dance term commences next year (mid February).

A Desert Rose

In the beginning it was the count 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8……..
Counting, while I throw and catch the veil, now count while I do those barrel turns
Counting, counting, counting….
Then something started happening within, a feeling.
As I practiced more this feeling would whelm up inside, at times I would feel teary
Why was this happening? This dance had an effect on me.

Over the weeks, as I heard the story behind the dance, I came to realize,
it was telling my story.

For most of my life I sat on the side line. Always staying in my comfort zone.
I married, raised 3 children, divorced, found true love, married again, widowed, became a grandmother of 4. Some of these experiences left me in a place with no joy, a place of self doubt, and struggle.

Then at 50 years of age I found myself with a hip scarf on at an adult education class for belly dance, and I knew this is where I'm meant to be. Well and truly out of my comfort zone.
It has taken a while for that bud to grow, to come out of the shadows.
As I dance today in the different groups within Soul Dance I may not be perfect but I have progressed and to me that's what it about.

This photo to me says it all, that I turn my back on the self doubt and the dark places
For today I am a rose.

Marilyn

Sirene Ballet Class

Over three weeks have now passed since the Gala, and I can safely say, this year has been a most successful and inspiring one. My adult ballet class, Sirene, have been learning together for some 10 months now, cumulating with our performance of "Iris" at the gala, accompanied by the musical styling of Sabastian Brand. The experience of dancing for an audience was brand new to some of us, as we getting the fantastic opportunity to perform to live music. I hope everyone enjoyed watching it just as much as we enjoyed learning and performing it. It was a truly amazing event – I look forward to seeing what we all create next year.

Ballet is often referred to as the foundation for all other dance styles and is commonly taken in conjunction with classes of other styles to become a well rounded dancer and performer. Many of the techniques within ballet can be applied to other styles, including belly dancing. Ballet teaches strength, poise/stage presence, balance, flexibility and a strong sense of dedication. All of these skills can be applied to other styles, and certain exercises can also prove to translate well.

As demonstrated for those who saw our performance of "Iris", I teach modern/contemporary ballet, which while based on classical ballet, it also takes principals from modern dance (also often referred to as lyrical dance), and in some cases contemporary dance. Modern ballet is less restricted to classical ballet principals and technique and also provides much larger choreographic license. Modern ballet also opens the door to dance to more modern or popular music, rather than purely classical.

Class will take a short break over Christmas and will be back with vengeance in early February. Anyone who is interested in taking ballet (male or female, all ages, shapes and sizes) can register their interest for the new year to myself at michellelaurenson@hotmail.com. No previous dance or ballet experience is required.

While I do love ballet, it was not my first love – tap dancing was my style of choice for over a decade, and it comes to my mind again perhaps it is time for me to share my vast training and passion. I have experience in many aspects of tap – from the classic 1950's Fred Astaire and Gene Kelly style to the currently more popular Tap Dogs/Raw Metal acapella style. If you've ever considered injecting some noise into your dance world, express your interest to me at the above email address. I am also considering running a workshop in the new year – ballet for belly dancers, which would be a snapshot into the benefits you can gain from ballet that can translate directly to belly dancing.

I must thank my glorious students Olivia, Cheryl, Mel and Tracey for their ongoing dedication and commitment to ballet, our class, and me this year, and also to Soul Dance's fearless leader Margaret, for affording me the opportunity of teaching this class and for continually inspiring me to challenge myself.

I look forward to continuing my dance journey in the 2012 with you all!

Love and pliés,

Michelle

Greetings from Jewels of Arabia

Well 2011 has gone in a flash!

First off I would like to say a big thank you to the wonderful ladies from Jewels of Arabia for their dedication and commitment, in giving up Saturday morning and weekends to spread their joy of dance throughout the community. Also to their husbands and partners who now join us at these events to film us.

A special thank you to Erica, who has decided to hand in her costume. Erica has been with the troupe for a long time and always had us and the audience in awe as she waved the sword around almost at times giving the elderly residents a near heart attack.

Also Diana, who is one of the original Jewels, who is taking a break and heading off with hubby Mark to destinations around Australia with caravan in tow. Her costume is staying with her to remind her to come back as we will miss her beautiful smile and her energy. Thank you Diana, for your support.

2011 has been quieter than most years, starting off with bad weather so many of the outside venues were cancelled. With most of our girls now working through the week, we haven't been able to perform at the many respite and nursing homes as previous years. We do miss that interaction with the elderly, and seeing the lovely smiles they give us. Hopefully in 2012 we may be able to get back to some of these venues.

For the last 7 years we have been performing at the Caboolture Multicultural Festival and Harmony Day at Redcliffe. As you can imagine it is hard at times to come up with different dances to keep the audience captivated. This year we decided to change our costumes and perform a set of Spanish and gypsy influenced dances. So in keeping with the colours of our costumes we borrowed the salsa skirts from the Tues night girls (Thank you girls). It certainly uplifted us and brought a lot of colour to our performance. It was certainly a highlight for us.

Apart from these festivals we have also performed at a Health Expo at Petrie Markets, ladies night in, and the night before the hafla, some of us performed at a fundraiser for a Lord Mayor candidate for Moreton Shire, which certainly was different.

We also danced through the streets of Scarborough for the annual Xmas Parade, and our last one for the year is on the 21st when it will be a champagne breakfast for a retirement home.

Each year we try to learn a new group dance. This year the group learnt what we call Ah Ramadan. This one was originally taught by Margaret (choreographed by Margaret and Mel) for the community troupe when it first began. Seeing there were only 2 of us left from the original group, we thought it would be a good one to bring back. This was performed at the hafla and the girls did well to learn it from our Saturday practices and dvds.

I would like to extend to an invitation in 2012 to any one from Soul Dance who thinks that maybe they would like to join us. Come along to a Saturday practice and have a chat. I know that some of the new beginners were influenced to join Soul Dance by seeing us perform. Community troupe will give you experience in performing, will enhance your dancing and much more. Some of the ladies this year did their first solo which has a lot to do with the confidence that being part of the troupe has given them. There is always a chat and coffee afterwards.

I would like to take this opportunity on behalf of the "Jewels" to wish you all a very Merry Xmas and a lot of dancing in 2012.

Marilyn

Meet Some of the "Jewels"

Community Troupe this year has been a bit slower then previous years with a couple of weekend events cancelled due to poor weather. But the ones we have done have been fantastic, in particular Caboolture Multicultural Festival. This year I had the opportunity to do a workshop as well as a performance and it was great to be able to bring a bit of dance into the lives of people even if it was only for 15 minutes. But due to the Jewel's performing at the Festival we tickled the interest of a couple members of the audience who have just completed a 6 week beginner's course with the school. It's good to know that we influence other ladies to try something new.

Sadly this year I was unable to perform due to tearing my calf muscle a week before our end of year gala event. It was a hard decision to not perform after weeks of preparation, but being able to see Gamila Ruh and the Jewel's perform on the night was just as memorable as being up on stage myself. I know I was up there in spirit with both groups.

Look forward to spending time with the Jewel's ladies in 2012 and hopefully many more enjoyable performances to come.

Jess Glover

Time spent with the Jewel's of Arabia ladies has not only been about the dancing but about friendships. I look forward to my Saturday morning dance practice followed with a cup of coffee and scones while we all sit around chatting about our weekends or discuss up coming performances. We may be a mixed bunch of ladies ranging in different ages and experience but we know we can call on each other in times of need and we always manage to find something to laugh about at each practice. Look forward to enjoying many more cups of coffee with the ladies.

Debbie Glover

The highlight for me this year was the Caboolture Multi Cultural Festival in September. We performed a medley of skirt dances, the music was a variety of Gypsy, Middle Eastern and Spanish style, high energy and exciting. The Jewels of Arabia brought the beautiful colourful skirts alive, twirling and swishing around the stage. The fun, friendship and commitment of all the members make the Community Troup a positive and worthwhile past time. Thanks to Marilyn for her dedication and leadership.

Dot

It was through Diana's encouragement that I decided to join the Jewels, a little over 2 years ago. It certainly doesn't feel like it's been that long. I look forward to spending each 2nd Saturday with the girls, running through our dances, chatting and laughing, and my involvement has become such an important part of my life. In the early days, before any performances, my legs would shiver and shake with nerves, but with time my confidence in myself and performing in front an audience has grown. It was this that allowed me to choreograph and perform my first solo at the Gala. Thank you to Marilyn and the girls for offering me the opportunity to be a precious Jewel.

Shona

RMCAInc

REDCLIFFE MULTICULTURAL COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION INC.
ABN:84 882 494 042

Jewels of Arabia

C/- Marilyn Trama

Uni 6, 51 Flinders Pde

Sacarborough

Qld 4020

25.10.2011

Dear Jewels of Arabia

On behalf of the members of the Redcliffe Multicultural Community Association Incorporated

I would like to thank you very much for your great presentation of the Romani & Arabian Culture, on Saturday 22nd October, 2011.

Your attendance and standard of Music & Dancing to our members and guests , at the UN Day Concert, were very much appreciated by all.

The colourful costumes of your group were also outstanding.

Your continued support to encouraging multicultural appreciation, and mutual respect, in our area is very generous.

Yours sincerely

S C Antonio

Shirley C Antonio OAM

Secretary RMCAI

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"Jezoor"

means Roots… without our roots we are merely a seeking seed.

When roots are exposed, they bare beauty to the world to enjoy, in the forms of flowers and fruits. This blossoming flower of dance that I carry to you is unique and has its roots implanted in Egypt. I want to pass on this deep rooted flower, for you to share, enjoy and enrich your lives, as it did mine.

I have chosen to join "Soul Dance" this year because I found the dance school to be unique in many ways. I knew that I would be treated with respect and care for what I have to offer and I was.

I want to thank each and every one who came to my classes. It was a pleasure working with you and getting to know you all. Most of all, I like to acknowledge the hard work that Margaret puts into all she does, to keep everyone happy and everything happening for everyone. It is a very difficult task and she does it with such ease, that only few can.

The debut of "Jezoor" was very well received. The dances were new to the Brisbane scene. Everyone had a lot of fun performing them. We, the dancers, had a trying time adjusting the costumes, but working as a team made it all possible. The final result left everyone wanting more. There is no stopping us now.

The Medieval Festival earlier this year renewed my confidence. I was glad to be involved in it. Reenacting as a trader at the Gypsy Camp, felt good and what a wonderful display that was for everyone to see. I thought we looked great. I felt privileged when asked to lead the dancers in the dance circle. Thanks for that. The dances were performed with quality professionalism.

The highlight of this year, for me, was going to Perth in November, for a workshop Keti Sharif in Perth organized, with "Farida Fahmy". Farida, has been my idol and inspiration since I was 9 years old and that is a very long time. I was accompanied to Perth, by the two most charming personalities in the dance scene in Brisbane that I know, Margaret Cunningham and Tamara Williams, to me that was very special. The workshops refreshed my thinking and gave me a clearer vision of what I already knew.

Farida Fahmy is the Queen of the style I teach, it is the stage adaptation of the Egyptian folk dancing that Farida and Mahmoud Reda (her brother in law), her husband and others of her family started in the late 1950's. They made extended researches of the traditional dances, around Egypt. These were brought back to the capital, refined and introduced to the stage. The Reda Style became the most popular form of dance for the young in the 1960's and the most watched by everyone, I know this because I was there and it is documented. They represented Egypt, around the World, in many events. They are still planting the roots of this dance, around the world, today, through lectures and workshops.

My vision for the year to come is to continue to pass on the knowledge I have to others, showcase as many dances as possible, dances I learned growing up from the Reda Style.

In conclusion, I wish you all a Happy and Healthy Christmas and a New Year that is far reaching.

A wise man once said…If you do not step forward, you'll always be in the same place.

Salam

Marlene

Greetings Soul Sisters,

What an amazing introduction to belly dance! Being one of the newest additions to Souldance I have not had much time to get to know all of the beautiful women who make up the troupe we are so lovingly a part of. But I can say that every one of you is so welcoming to all the newcomers. With the encouragement of our very own Margaret Cunningham and Helen Hampton I quickly found myself immersed in the rhythms of belly dance and greatly looking forward to my Mondays! Fairly new to the styles of belly dance, I had very little idea of what was in store for me. I quickly learnt that belly dance is all about the women and I felt accepted (and included) from my first minute in the studio!

It is with great disappointment that I say farewell for the Christmas break but I will be looking forward to the beginning of classes again next year.

On behalf of all the new students I would like to say a thank you to Margaret and Helen for being so encouraging to us all. You have taught me a lot and I look forward to learning from you all in the future.

Until next time, kaity xx

Wednesday Nighters

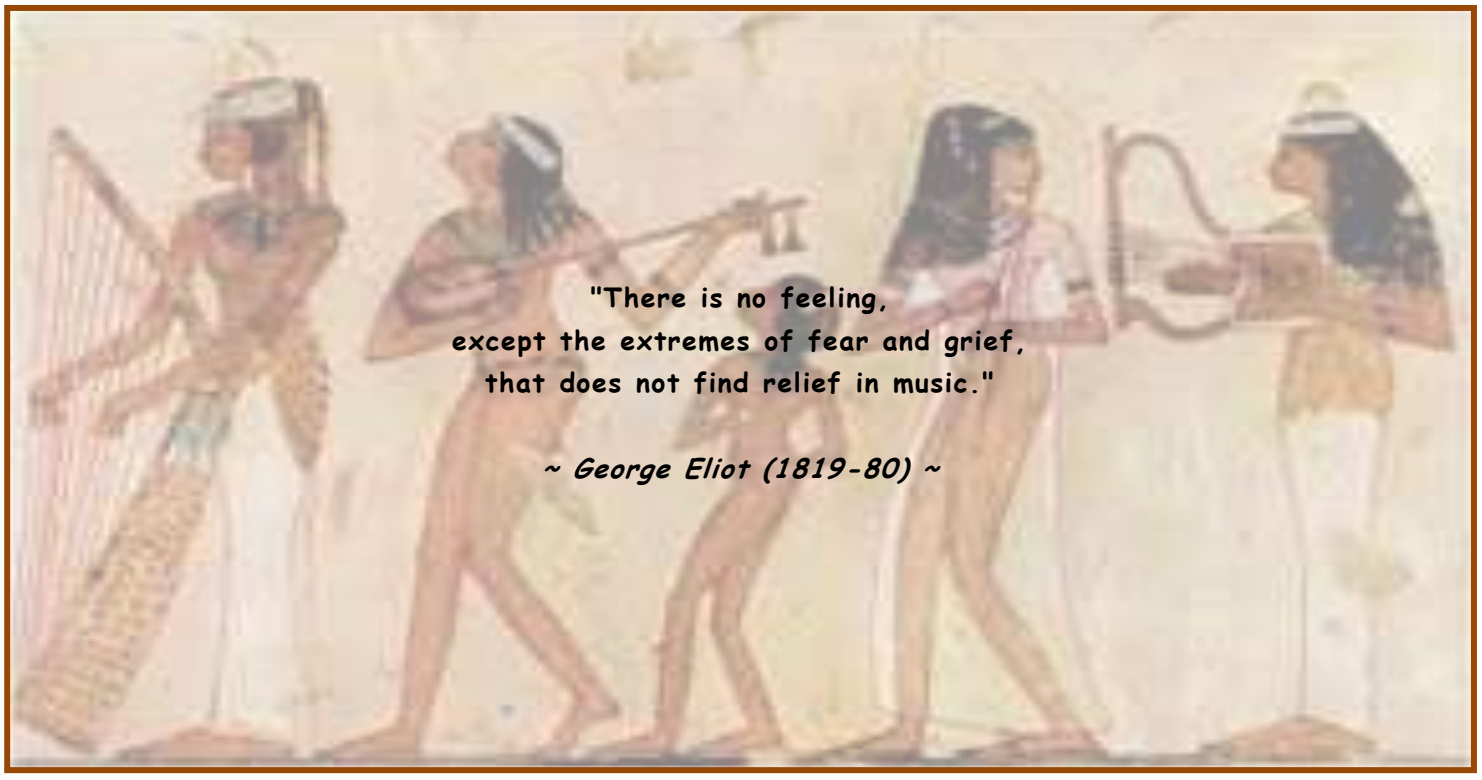
Each Wednesday night, five divas meet for 90 minutes of fun, frivolity and of course bellydancing.

Two years ago, Shelley, Katie and I were facing the prospect of having to stop bellydancing due to work commitments. As none us wanted to stop dancing, we investigated some options. Thankfully the fabulous Margaret came to the rescue and offered to drive to Stafford Heights to Shelley's place so the three of us could continue to dance. Add in the lovely Marnie and the Wednesday night group was formed!

We have only been dancing as a group for two years but we clicked straight away and have been having such a blast in our classes! We spend a lot of time laughing or sitting on the couch or lying on the floor whenever Margs turns her back!

We also have an unofficial member in Shelley's cattle dog Buster who vocally joins in during the more robust songs. Our "studio" is Shelley's TV room and we have no practice mirrors, although we could ask the neighbours who occasionally look through the open windows if what we're doing looks any good! It's also a challenge to practice with swords as we discovered while learning Desert Rose as we had to duck and weave to avoid the lights, the furniture and the television.

This year we worked on "OP", a funky little dance choreographed by Margs and sung by Tarkan (with backup vocals provided by Buster). We all enjoyed learning the dance, although there were times when the choreography proved challenging and we wondered if we'd ever get it right (especially when Margs would stop the cd every 30 seconds and ask us to start again!). But we did get it right in the end and it turned out to be one of our favourite dances. Now we're looking forward to our next choreography, which we're sure will be just as much fun as OP.

Thanks to Margs for being so flexible, because of this we have been able to continue dancing! We hope everyone has a Merry Christmas and we look forward to seeing everyone's fabulous dances at the 2012 hafla!

Sara Gollschewski