

REVIEW OF MASRIAT DANCE COMPANY PERFORMANCE

Beyond the Jasmine Veil

Jackson's Lane Theatre 4th December 2003

By Jude Smit

On 4th December Josephine Wise's prestigious dance company, Masriat, performed their stunning show, *Beyond the Jasmine Veil*, at Jackson's Lane theatre in London. The show was performed in two halves, the first half consisting of a variety of styles and music and the second half comprising a full-length Oriental piece with taqasim (solos). The company dancers were Gwen Booth, Catherine Clarke, Yvette Cowles, Chris Gould, Agnieszka Jablonska, Margaret Krause, Dana Parkhill, Trish Rapley Giles and Josephine Wise.

The show commenced with a bold Baladi style dance, choreographed by Margaret Krause. The dance starts with a group of sophisticated Cairo ladies meeting for an evening party. The dance was fun and flirtatious and synchronised perfectly. The mini solo and duet sections remained in character as the other ladies watched with enthusiasm, being particularly entertained by the coquettish interaction between Dana and Yvette.

The second dance was a delightfully playful and cheeky dance by Josephine Wise, set in Cairo where a woman searches for a husband, using her charm to attract a suitable beau. Her costume was glitzy, yet demurely covered by a 'meleya' shawl, which she manipulated expertly, whilst enticing the crowd, giving them a 'cheeky peek' of her face before covering it again. The kicking off of her heeled shoes, coupled with chewing gum, gave the audience real enjoyment as Josephine continued to seduce them with her fantastic facial expressions and effortless style.

Lamma Bada, the third dance changed the mood with its haunting music, transporting the audience back in time to Medieval Andalusia. The dance was elegant and sophisticated. The costumes were beautifully crafted and all the dancers wore headdresses and matching skirts. The dancers looked pensive and serious and danced in a stately fashion, ending in a pose reminiscent of an ancient painting.

Yvette Cowles followed with a modern fusion dance, contrasting heavy Moroccan drums with lighter Egyptian tabla solos. She was wearing a fabulous red costume dress with veil sleeves. The dance was modern and sensual in feel, including fluid movements leading into a drum solo manipulated with grace and style. Yvette showed her skill by incorporating many intricate overlays in her dance, adding to its overall artistic effect.

The following dance was a piece of Cairo pop performed by Trish Rapley Giles. Dressed in a stunning green full-length dress she entertained the crowd with funky step patterns and sharp, contained movements, executed with finesse. Trish danced skilfully, complimenting the music with a variety of integrated techniques.

This dance was followed by a Ghawazee cane dance by Catherine Clarke and Dana Parkhill. The feisty interaction between the two dancers was extremely entertaining and added to the character of the dance. The dance was well choreographed and performed and the traditional nature of the costumes had been maintained.

Margaret Krause's solo was next and she shone in her fabulous silver and black Baladi dress. The Baladi style dance was elegant and graceful, yet flirtatious in nature too. Margaret used a variety of moves, skilfully adding dramatic accents to the music, creating an intricate choreography. The audience were captured by Margaret's effortless style and confidence.

Josephine Wise's *Journey of the Gypsy Dancer*, the next dance, was captivating, starting with Josephine facing the back and spotlighted through her sheer veil, wearing a stunning silver costume. The sensual, slow start was offset with vibrant moves. There was a wonderful contrast of speeds and pace of the dance. The dance was a longer piece of choreography encompassing all facets of the dance from slow and sensual to frivolity and fun. Josephine danced with total confidence and entertained the audience not only with her beautiful choreography and her dexterous manipulation of her veil, but also with her wonderful interactions with the audience.

The final dance of the first section was performed to *Badi Mushkil*. It was a modern 'Bollywood' style group dance performed by the company and choreographed by Yvette Cowles. The lighting accentuated the eye-catching colourful costumes, creating a visual feast. The lively and energetic dance was thoroughly entertaining and left many in the audience with a feeling of wanting to try this style of dance, which has strong Egyptian influences.

The second part of the show was entitled *Dance of the East*. It was a full-length Oriental piece with taqasim, including Baladi, Saidi and Darwich sections. The piece in its entirety was well manipulated and showed the professionalism of the company, as they danced their way through the variety of styles and each dancer's elegant individual solo section.

The entire show was mesmerising and beautifully presented. Both audience and dancers evidently enjoyed themselves and at the end of the evening were left with a satisfied, enriched feeling. The variety of styles and performances reflected the insight and accuracy with which the company prepare in order to retain authenticity and yet bring the dance firmly into the Twenty First Century.