

Arabian Woman

Always Inspiring

SELFLESS UNESCO STARS EXPOSED

- * RHIMOU BOUHLAL
- * FATIMA ABBAS
- * SARRAH BEN M'BAREK

THE HAUTE LOT

ARAB
DESIGN
TALENT
REVEALED

BE WARNED!

GET RID
OF THAT
JEALOUS MAN

ANTI-AGING SECRETS

WHAT'S NEW
ON THE FRONT

GET OVER IT

HOW TO HEAL
YOURSELF

DETOX SPA SECRETS FROM DOHA

REGIONAL REPORT

WAR ZONE BLUES

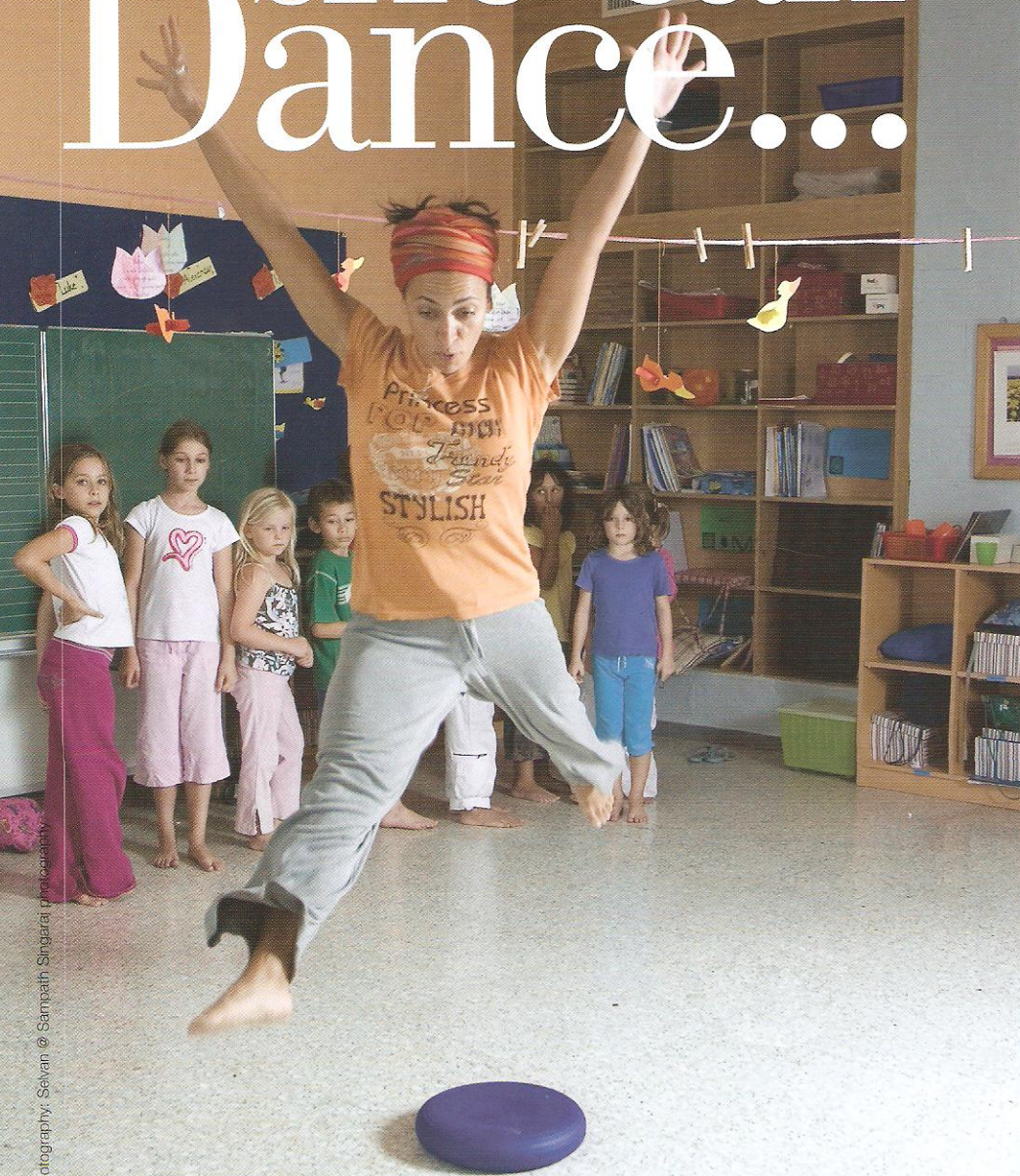
WHO WILL
FIX IRAQ?

Queen Carole Samaha reigns supreme as Zenobia

PIGGY
BANK
101
GET MONEY SAVING

SAUDI ARABIA \$10 • UAE DHS10 • OMAN RO1 • BAHRAIN BD1 • QATAR QRT0 • KUWAIT KD1 • JORDAN JD2 • LEBANON LL4000 • EGYPT EP10

So, she thinks she can Dance...



Photography: Sévan @ Sammath Singarat photography

Although Nadja Issa was born in Vienna and grew up mostly in Germany, her half Egyptian and half Austrian roots have been the source of immense inspiration for her dance choreography. Rohini Nagu caught up with her to find out how her life dedicated to dance has fared so far.

At the age of three, Nadja suffered from the deformity of inverted feet that made walking very difficult. Because of this physical disability, her orthopedist suggested that her parents enroll her for children's dance lessons as that may help to correct this deformity. So what started at the age of three as a physical therapy for her condition, became pre-education for her future in creative dancing. Since then Nadja has never looked back.

How long have you been a dancer and choreographer and how did you get into it? At 19, following my graduation, I turned professional and have been dancing ever since. As a choreographer, I started a little bit earlier at 17 years. But I really did start dancing at a very young age. At 15 years after watching the CATS musical in Vienna, I was completely blown away by their performance and that's when I declared my path on to the stage.

What did you study at university/college? Do you have any formal training in dancing arts?

Following my high school graduation, I joined the New York City Dance School in Stuttgart, Germany to pursue my musical studies which included dancing, acting, singing and dance-education. Immediately after graduating from the dance school I went into performing. However, I, then returned to the university to study Social and Media Education. And last year I returned and received a certificate in dance medicine, a subject very close to my heart. Dance Medicine integrates anatomy of the body into movements. It teaches dancers movements that do not strain the body therefore healthy techniques of movements are applied to all parts of the body when dancing.

You are currently promoting your new form of aerial performance called 'Art in the Air'. Can you tell us more about this?

'Art in the Air' offers exhilarating aerial dance performances that combine various forms of dance, stunts dance, flight acrobatics and music to provide alluring, dramatic, and compelling performance. It is performed on a vertical stage and the audience is transformed into a new musical experience of up-side down entertainment. It is an innovative form of art and performance providing an array of opportunities between physical movement of the dancers and their interaction with their surroundings. 'Art in the Air' challenges



any locations and venues including modern skyscrapers, whether indoors or outdoors, performances blend aerial work of seamless dance with the surrounding of its location. From walls to buildings to cranes, theatres, cinemas, sports clubs, malls, rooftops, fire escapes, industrial cranes and exhibitions, it can transform any venue into a vertical stage of in-flight story telling delivering an exhilarating display of airborne artistry.

If one were to attend a workshop of yours, what can they expect?

If one were to attend my workshop, they can expect to be thoroughly entertained, informed, educated, surprised, shocked and above all be thrilled and overjoyed by the deeper and meaningful insights into their life. People can expect to attain tools that they can use every day to keep themselves on a positive and inspirational track. And above all, when tools are applied consistently, people can expect massive results in the areas they choose to handle.

How are preparations for the show coming along?

At the moment I'm busy introducing and promoting 'Art in the Air' to potential clients. Because this is a new concept in Dubai, there's a lot of interest being shown but I'm still waiting for confirmations. But of course the preparation is not limited to that I'm also working with my designer to create costumes for the stilt dance and the 'Art in the Air'. I'm also scouring the market for talents that can be moulded to perform these dance routines otherwise I will have to fly performers from Germany and this is not cost effective especially for clients on a budget. And most of all because each show is different, I constantly have to look at options to create unique shows so I'm constantly working a mental choreography for performances that I can shelve for now.

Owing to your Arabian roots (your father is Egyptian) have you ever used the traditional Arabian dance arts in your choreography?

When I was a child, living in Egypt, I learned belly dancing. Unfortunately returning to Germany meant that I had to leave behind that art and my dance education did not include this particular form of dance technique so I had to give it up to pursue the other forms of dance. I find it hard now to get these movements into my system. I have used the Arabic tabla music into some of my performances as well as music from the legendary Egyptian singer Oum Kalsum so I do look at my heritage for inspiration.

What inspires your work?

I get my inspirations from life. The ups and the downs of it. My travels, movies, situations and sometimes just observing people. I draw a lot of my inspirations from the ordinary things in life for example a butterfly may inspire my next choreography to depict the butterfly movements, the costumes may also be inspired by the colourful variety of butterflies and so on. I don't limit myself to look at

certain aspect for inspiration but open the boundaries for new things to come through.

What do you love the most about your job and why?

I love my work. It makes me feel closer to the Lord. I sometimes feel that I am doing God's Work, making people free from their negativity, their worries, the unnecessary baggage they carry. I feel that by adding more positive value to people's lives, I am making a great contribution to mankind, and that makes me so proud. I am happy, generally, and I feel a sense of peace every single day, knowing that I am doing good work. My work is my prayer and what I love most is that my work has made me a better person. My work has given me a better family life and a sense of balance. I get to learn so much, know so much. My level of tolerance and spirit of freedom is ever growing. My work keeps me connected with the Creator and his message, of making this life count, as his blessing. Life truly is a blessing, I get to live that message, everyday.

Describe a typical day at work.

As a freelance artist there is no such thing as a typical working day. This is simply because I'm juggling between clients' meetings to get new briefs, to heading out to the costume designer, who probably hasn't finished my costumes and of course switch moods according to the demands of the series of dance lessons and the choreography sessions. Of course that doesn't include a trip to the venue to look at the technical requirements which means I need to speak to the technical team to work on the mechanism of the entire set up. Then back to the rehearsals where the dancers lack energy I'm looking for and frustration builds up because I've just realised I have only two days to get this show on stage. That may give you some sort of indication of a typical day for me.

How can one make a breakthrough in this industry?

Firstly love for your work is key and secondly hard work and ambition to grow and develop. You need to be enthusiastic because some days are harder than others and you constantly need to remind yourself why you are where you are without losing focus. Dancers train everyday without fail and this is not just exercise but dance training, learning new routines, techniques and working to bring something fresh into their style. Because its all about individuality, you as a dancer need to develop your own style so there's a lot of constant work there. You need to keep your energy levels high, be creative and open to criticism because not all of it is bad.

Does it take a special kind of person to become a dancer and choreographer?

Being a dancer or choreographer is hard work. Patience is a virtue; because frustrations are bound to set in. Sometimes assignments don't come in so you need to be able to accept that, so your physical strength needs to be complemented by mental stability. But that's not the only thing. You need to be

tolerant and accepting to other dancers. You cannot be close minded and be stuck in a dance style or routine. You need to be able to embrace all types of dance forms so that you allow yourself to grow into an all-rounder. As a choreographer, you need to practice the art of appreciation and open-mindedness because sometimes especially when working with diverse dancing backgrounds, dancers may be able to bring in something new and fresh to the routine. For some choreographers this may be hard to accept but a good choreographer needs to be open to accepting new techniques from the dancers.

What, in your opinion, is one of the biggest challenges one faces in this industry? And your recommendations to overcome that?

Pressure is the biggest challenge in this industry. Pressure to perform, pressure to stand out and showcase your individuality. Pressure to keep up with trends and styles – it just doesn't stop. And of course there's the pressure that your body has to go through on

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a daily basis of aggressive work outs, training and rehearsals. Pressure of competition, again if your style is not distinctive then nobody will care. So that is a constant nag to dancers. Plus entertainment industry has its own exaggerated lifestyle that comes with the territory, so there's that pressure as well, of fitting in. It's very easy to get tempted and sucked into the system but if you are headstrong and you don't lose your focus then that should get you through.

Which artists have influenced you the most?

At aged 15, my parents took me to the theatre to watch my first musical CATS in Vienna. I was left completely overwhelmed by the energy of that performance. It was exhilarating and breath-taking that immediately I knew what I wanted to do after graduation. Although there were a lot of obstacles along the way, I was so determined to fulfil this dream.

Do you have any shows coming up?

I'm currently looking at different opportunities with various companies for their upcoming events. Because the briefs are different it makes the projects exciting and I'm looking forward to showcasing variety of productions here in the region and bring new forms of dance on to the stage.

So, she Dance

Letter of a reader

Happy Feet

I loved your interview with Nadja Issa. I believe that Nadja will be a refreshing change to the quickly stagnating pool of dancers in Dubai. Please can you let us know how we can contact her for private classes and update us about her future shows. I would love to watch her perform live.

Zainab AlWuheidi Dubai, UAE

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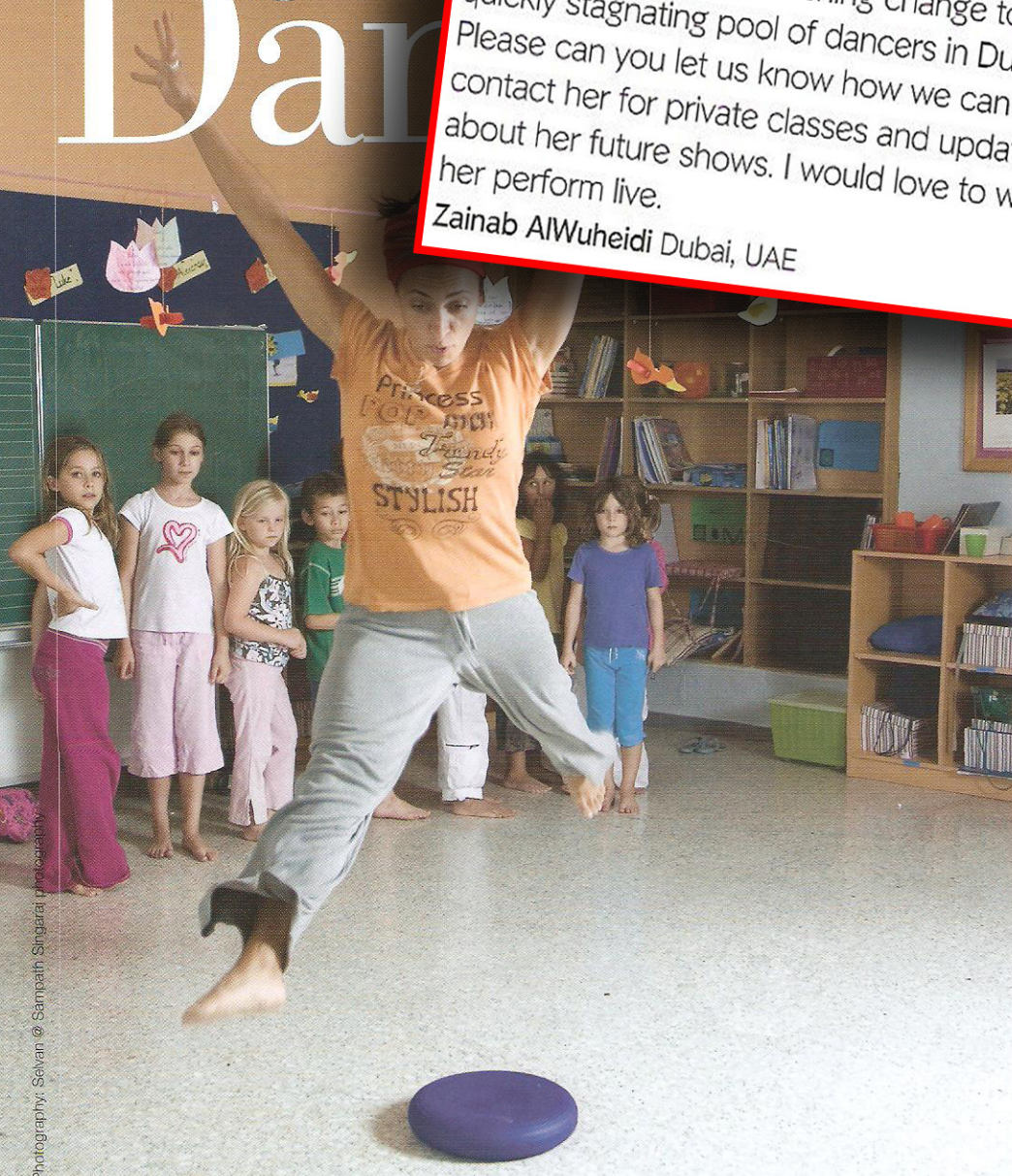
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