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**OK!**

**MIDDLE EAST**

**FIRST FOR CELEBRITY NEWS**

ISSUE 112 • MARCH 29, 2007 • WEEKLY

**NADINE  
& JESSE  
'OUR BEACH  
WEDDING'**

**WORLD EXCLUSIVE  
INTERVIEW & PICTURES**

ONLY IN OK! MARCH 2007

**'I'LL BE HAPPY  
TO BABYSIT FOR  
CHERYL'**

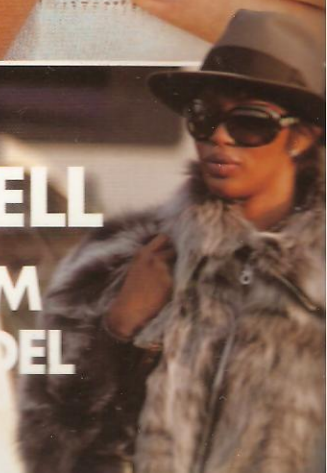
**FRANKIE DETTORI**



**RELAXING WITH HIS FAMILY IN**

**NAOMI  
CAMPBELL**

**GOES FROM  
SUPERMODEL  
TO SUPER  
SCULPTED**



'COOLIO WAS A HUGE DIVA'

# NADJA ISSA

OK! MIDDLE EAST CAUGHT UP WITH THE DANCER EXTRAORDINAIRE AND CHOREOGRAPHER TO THE STARS AT DUBAI'S HIP CENTRAL PERK



**W**hen Nadja Issa agreed to meet us for lunch we half expected the petite yet toned beauty to walk in on stilts or crawl the walls like Spiderman. For the past six years the renowned dancer/choreographer/performer/director has been taking her work into the magical world of zero gravity. As the revolutionary creator of *Art in the Air*, Nadja literally turns dance performances on their head by taking them into the air offering a spectacular show on a par with *Cirque de Soleil's*.

Here we manage to grab a coffee with the undeniably talented performer and get her to spill the beans on celebrity divas, the critical world of dance and how she got into the industry...

#### How did you get into dancing?

I was almost forced into it due to a medical condition. I was three-years-old and had anatomical problems which made my feet turn inwards. My doctors told me to go to dance class as it teaches you how to walk with your feet and straighten them out. So that's how I started, ballet repositioned me.

#### At what point did you think dance was something you had to do?

When I saw my first musical, it was *Cats* in Vienna. I was mesmerised. I remember saying to my parents afterwards, "Wow that's what I want to do. I want to be on that stage." They were quite supportive and just told me to wait and see how I felt when I finished school.

#### And how did you feel when you finished?

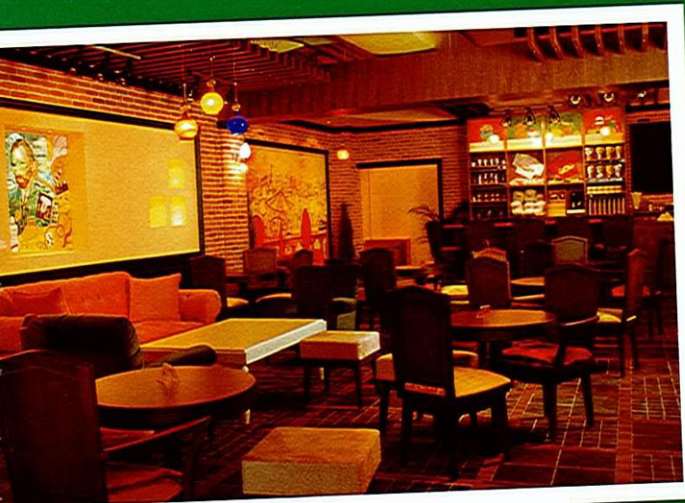
The same, I successfully auditioned for a place at New York City dance school in Germany. It was just like the actual New York school, the whole American system was brought over to Germany.

#### How tough was it at the school?

Very tough. It was a two-year course in which we started at 9am and finished at 6pm. It was musical education,



Above: Stylish Nadja takes some valuable time out from her amazing *Art in the Air* show and stilt rehearsals to have a chat with her favourite celebrity magazine.



***Inset:*** Inside the friendly and funky cafe, Central Perk. ***Right:*** Nadja is determined to find a pool of good dancers in Dubai.



which included dancing, singing and acting. We also had to learn how to teach others how to dance and learn the anatomical side so we understood how to use the body correctly.

#### **That sounds pretty hardcore...**

It really was difficult, so much so that when I finished the school I wanted to quit dancing. It was a musical education but I wasn't ready to go into musicals and do the same thing everyday without putting in my own input.

#### **How did you get the passion back?**

On my graduation day there was a director from a dance theatre company who approached me for work. He offered me an opportunity to choreograph a team of dancers. It involved translating my ideas through dance and of course, being creative, I loved the idea. From that point on I started to choreograph my own routine for my kids. By the time I was 21 I was teaching classes.

#### **How did all that work get you noticed in the dance world?**

Word spread of my work and how well the theatre was doing so I eventually started working on TV and I even learned new dance acts such as stilt walking!

#### **How on earth did you get into stilt walking?**

[Laughs] I taught myself! I met some people from a company that performed a stilt show. I was so impressed that after their performance I approached them and said, "Look if ever you need somebody, I'm there." They called three weeks later and said, "You have two days to learn our stilt show then you have to change it to do your own choreography." They needed something new before they performed in Mexico.

#### **How difficult was it to learn?**

As a flexible dancer I picked it up very quickly. It was actually good because I'm so short so for once I was the tallest and it felt great. The show was a huge success.

#### **What shows inspire you?**

I saw this amazing show from a team of Argentinean dancers in Berlin. It was fantastic, the dancers were jumping off walls like Spiderman and I knew I just had to try it. I was actually lucky because they held auditions for a new dancer the next day. I went and they took me on. That's how I started to get into dance acrobatics, it inspired me to do *Art in the Air*.

#### **Tell us about *Art in the Air*.**

It's basically a vertical show – dancing and performing in the air. Whatever you want to do on the ground we take it up on the air. We can do everything up there including tap and a stilt act!

#### **But isn't that harder to perform?**

Yes it is! It's a strange feeling. You're upside down so your body is constantly at an angle.

#### **How popular is it?**

The show started in Germany six years ago but now it's going worldwide. We've performed everywhere from

Argentina to here in Dubai. People are very interested as it's very different. No matter where you sit in the theatre you can see the show as it is in the air.

#### **What are people like in the dance industry?**

They can be very catty so I choose to work with people who I have the right chemistry with. I won't hire people who I don't get along with as I need people who are willing and in the mood to create something new together.

#### **What are you doing here in Dubai?**

I work with kids, I look at how they walk and how they use their body and then I teach them how to dance accordingly. I do different exercises for each kid so each individual does something they enjoy.

#### **Who do you admire?**

I have a lot respect for people who create something that is important for dance. I like Bob Fosse, the choreographer for Chicago, he didn't just work with special dancers he used wide people, short dancers and disabled people. I also loved how Gene Kelly used his feet as an instrument, it wasn't about dance but the rhythm.

#### **What process do you go through to create new dance moves?**

I love mixing old and new styles. I always try to do something new – it's a challenge. Sometimes I have no ideas at all then one day I could be brushing my teeth and be inspired.

#### **What has been your biggest challenge?**

Working on holiday resorts and training staff, such as receptionists and waiters, to dance like professionals for evening shows. Some of these people have never danced in their lives so it's inspiring to see how much they transform.

#### **What problems do you encounter as a dancer?**

It's tough knowing your body is your tool. If your body doesn't work right you don't get paid. As a dancer you feel the pressure to look after your body. As a choreographer it's slightly different as you don't dance as

much, you don't have to give 110 percent like a dancer.

#### **Who have been the biggest artists you've worked with?**

Coolio, the Weather Girls – who were hilarious – and Limahl [from 80s popband Kajagoogoo]. I used to idolise Limahl so it was amazing to actually get to work with him. He was so nice.

#### **Who was the biggest diva?**

Coolio. I coached him and his dancers and told them how to work in front of the camera. He was a good dancer but it was hard to get him to listen to my ideas.

#### **How do you stay fit?**

I regularly do exercises for my back and I run everyday. Each dancer has a different routine but everyone does the same stretching warm-up.

#### **How do you get the energy?**

When I don't run or dance for week I get bad back pain so that's incentive enough.

#### **Do you have a special diet?**

I never diet but there is a lot of pressure to stay slim in my industry, especially in ballet. You are expected to be stick thin and tall but it's unrealistic especially for short dancers like me. It's sad because a lot of people I know as dancers have eating disorders due to the pressure put on them.

#### **What are your plans for the future?**

To give good performances and to discover good dancers out here. The field here isn't very big but I would like to work on that. I would like to create a pool of good dancers in Dubai. I also have a project in Germany. I wrote a script with a director. It's a remake of *Cinderella* but performed in a humorous way through dance. We did castings on MTV for dancers. MTV did a tour through Germany finding dancers. The range of talent was unbelievable.

OK!

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY SURESH AND COURTESY OF CENTRAL PERK  
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