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Middle Eastern Dance Experimentation at the Electric Lodge

October 6, 2013

1:16 PM MST

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Amara opening the show by dancing in the audience.

Laura Ann Tull

An Evening of Experimental Middle Eastern Dance

At the Electric Lodge this past weekend is a dance performance of a different character, mixing Middle Eastern (including Asian) dance styles with western classical tradition. Produced by dancer Amara, the production consists of a dozen different dance routines, ranging from solo performances to beautifully orchestrated ensemble pieces, that give a taste of the orient and the exotic with ballet and modern dance. Many of the performances are accompanied by musicians David Krammerer, from New York, and Joe Savage, who normally is recorded, but came from Australia to play live.

The show opens with an experimental improvisational work by four dancers who each give a solo

performance that evolves into duets, followed by one performer leaving the stage to be replaced by a new solo artist. These four dancers include Amara dancing a combination of belly dancing and some Texas two step, joined at the end by Anaheed, director of the Perfumes of Anaby Dance Group. Anaheed is followed by founder of DanceVersity Hannah Romanowsky. Unfortunately on the night of Sunday the 29th Djahari Clark, director of Desert Sin, was not able to perform due to illness.

The next part of the production is from a larger work by the Gulistan Dance Theater directed by Carolyn Kruger called "Crossings: A Journey through the Seasons and Across Dimensions in a Collage of Alchemy and Ornament." Kruger describes the work as a metaphysical journey. It is a poetic exploration of the seasons in dance. For this performance we see part of the overall work, Winter and Spring.

The Dancers involved in the Winter section are Carolyn Kruger (Maiden of Snow) and playing guides: Gigi Corkett, Jane Glaser, Donna Speckman, and Akiko Tanikawa. This section is inspired by Egyptian philosophy. It involves the Maiden of Snow surrounded by dancing guides holding glowing or sparkling orbs.

The Spring section is called "First Spring: Blue Sky, White Wing – A Central Asian Creation Myth." The performers are Niki Henry as White Wing – Umai Ene, the Earth Goddess, and Gigi Corkett, Jane Glaser, Donna Speckman, and Akiko Tanikawa as the First Flowers. During this section we are told by narrator Carolyn Kruger is a version of creation.

The ensemble works are followed by two solo pieces, Avante La Pluie (Before the Rain) and Tribal Fusion Askey by Amara. The first is part of a larger work by dancer Mihrimah Ghaziya from France called "Leben" (Live) is an exploration of movement. The second piece by the show's producer Amara is a combination of belly dancing and insect like movements set to very modern techno robotic type music.

The intermission is normally followed by an ensemble piece, however the piece called Salome was moved to this position, performed by the French Dancer Mihrimah Ghaziya. It is a reinterpretation of the story of Salome from the Bible. As a warning this performance is adult with partial nudity. It is very well done with class and grace. As the story goes, Salome was to dance for the king and in the process remove her veils, and Ghaziya has interpreted these acts as a journey to "truth and spiritual revelation" and there is nothing seductive in the act she performs.

On the night of the 29th, due to the illness of Djarhari Clark, Director of Desert Sin, the next piece "Onania: or The Heinous Sin of Self Pollution" was replaced by a film of the same dance. It is a performance for adults. It is rather a graphic exploration of the concept that certain acts by women upon themselves have been considered unsacred and decaying.

The next work "The Burn" by dancer Hannah Romanowsky is a combination of movement from North Africa, Central Asia, and the Middle East. It includes styles from Persia, Flamenco, Sufi, and western contemporary. It is a work of fire with red veils and quick flowing positions that seem to suggest

evolving and transformations of life.

The next piece “Sacred Sun” is by the dancers from Tandemonium (Jean Duranti and Claudia Immerzeel) joined by guest Matt Dehaven and dressed in traditional Asian clothing reminiscent of Chinese paintings. The work makes use of the Asian form of flag work, with silk and fabric attached to wooden sticks spun through the air.

The last ensemble piece of the evening is “Stella Vativitatem” and it truly is what the title seems to imply, a dance of star movements. The costumes are based on the work by Loie Fuller, with capes like silk and dark lights. One gets the sense the dancers are moving in the night sky.

The work ends with a dance by Amara and normally Djahari but on the night of the 29th replaced by Mihrimah Ghaziya, portraying two young Baroque dressed men out on the town. The piece entitled Zefiro Torna (Zephyr (the West Wind that Brings Spring) Returns) is a fusion of Baroque, Persian, and belly dance and theatrically reflects perhaps an influence of the Romantic period of theater best known by the work of Moliere.

Overall the performances are mature, adult, provocative, and an interesting cultural exploration of perhaps how dance of today can be created as a mix of old, new, and the cultures of east and west.

The author wishes to apologize for the delay in posting this article, she had a combination of technical and misplaced documentation, also ensuring that the piece would not offend anyone. The show will run Friday through Sunday the weekend of the 27th and this weekend, with one more performance tonight at 7 pm. Information on tickets may be found at the Electric Lodge website. The Electric Lodge is located at 1416 Electric Avenue, Venice, CA.

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