

Dear LUTSF

It is with pleasure that I finally submit the report on my trip to Cairo - Egypt, which happened during the period between the 18th of June and 04th of July 2006. I am happy to inform you that I have successfully participated in both Nile Group Festival and Ahlan Wa Sahlan Festival. I am grateful to LUTSF for the financial support and for encouraging my artistic development.

The opportunity to attend the two world-leading festivals in the field of Oriental Dance and Middle East Folklore has changed my life. Professionally, the outcomes are above my expectations. Personally, I had the most fantastic experience. During the period I was in Cairo, I attended a total of 19 master classes. I was able to experience and observe closely, 16 renowned Egyptian teachers. I had the unique chance to attend a total of four Gala performances featuring the biggest artistes of the actual Egyptian scene. During the evenings I had the opportunity to attend Dance Shows accompanied by live music.

Despite my plans, I decided not to perform in the festival showcase. I realized that in order to receive feedback on my dancing, the only available solution was arranging a one to one session with an expert. To my relief, private tuition with Master teachers can be booked during the festival period. Both events succeeded in attracting professionals from around the globe and proved to be the heart of the Oriental Dance network.

I have gathered an impressive amount of information including, valuable notes, video footage of the results achieved at the end of each master class, video footage of the best live performances, hundreds of pictures and Mini-disc recordings of the lectures I attended as well as of informal talks between fellow professionals and myself, in a variety of subjects.

Besides my weekly shows in Brighton, I presented five Stage Performances since I arrived back from Cairo and it is now an established bimestrial event. I feel particularly excited by leading Egyptian/Middle East Folklore workshops at primary schools. I found that there are numerous possibilities of exploring and presenting the subject in an exciting and child friendly way, through dance and music. I constantly return to my notes and video footages from the Cairo festivals during the process of preparing my performances and classes. It has been extremely useful.

The highlight of this trip to Cairo was to be part of the "Nile Group Festival family". I had an extraordinary professional experience, in a healthy and creative environment spiced up by Egyptian hospitality and their tremendous sense of humour.

Thank you.
Sincerely yours,

Joice Marise S. Pereira

Here are some suggestions, which could help future awardees if participating in any of the mentioned festivals.

Traveling alone

Make the most of your experience by sharing accommodation with other single participants. The festival organizers are happy to arrange the matches and they usually provide information so roommates can exchange emails before departing to Cairo. Many of the single attendants are experienced travellers and established professionals, which means you will probably learn a couple of survival tips and will have a lot to talk about.

Managing the timetable and choosing workshops

These festivals are known for the high number of workshops and teachers on offer. A minimum of three classes takes place simultaneously, in the mornings, afternoons and early evenings. It gives the participants the chance to create their own timetable according to their interests and budget. The fact is that the outcomes will vary according to the choices made by the participants. There are common mistakes to be aware of. It is very important to avoid exhaustion as well as frustration led by the feeling of "wasted time and money".

- Be realistic about the number of activities you take on. The festival has also lots to offer outside the classrooms and late evening performances take place through out the week. 3hrs length workshops will require good physical condition so make sure you save sometime for food and sleep.
- Avoid disappointment and do not select classes simply picking by the instructor or by the style. Learn both, the teacher's profile and about the style on offer. Check on the website, read the festival booklets and ask for advise from fellow participants, preferably a professional who has previous experience at festivals or with the teacher in question.
- Be aware of the technical requirements of each workshop and be flexible regarding the teaching techniques used by the master instructors as it might vary according to their generation and background.

Performing at the festivals

If you can handle the pressure and are looking for artistic exposure, it is worth paying for a slot in the festivals competitions. These night-time open stages can go on forever! Either showcase or competition, try to book your spot early so you can perform within the first lot and hopefully you will catch an excited audience and a full table of judges/experts. But, if what you really are looking for is feedback on your dancing skills and performance, avoid stage slot fees and invest your money in private tuition with the Master teacher of your choice.

Report from Joice Marise

With the support of LUTSF, I travelled to Cairo for a period of Oriental Dance training intensives combined with the opportunity to attend high-quality performances, experience international artistic exchange and looking for critical feed-back from experts.

From the moment I started my journey, a rich cultural statement surrounded me. At the Egypt Air flight to Cairo I watched black and white Egyptian musicals, which are, known to have played an important role in establishing the Raks Sharqi or, Oriental Dance style and which displayed artists known today as the "Golden Era" dancers and singers. The airplane staff convinced me that I should go to a specific area in Old Cairo in order to purchase a traditional Galabeya dress. On the way to my hotel, the driver who collected me at the airport played a cassette and tried to explain to me about the composer. Despite my null Arabic, I knew what he was talking about, as it was an "oldie" and also a favorite of mine.

It is such a relief to see that those cultural treasures have not been forgotten or discarded. As a western practitioner of Oriental Dancing, I feel that to be able to trace back the development of the style is a necessity and the search for the roots and the traditional is a constant, as related subjects do matter. During the past decades, Cairo's artistic production has shown an enthusiasm towards absorbing pop culture and considering that some oriental dancers have achieved celebrity status in this part of the world, I guess it is normal that people like myself sounds slightly nostalgic and maybe reluctant towards certain trends. I can only say that I was glad to see that the artistic past still holds its place in the life and heart of Cairene people and that the Egyptian soul and its essence still play an important role in the arts of this country, even in the "pop" culture. Here is a report of what followed

The Festivals and the Dance training

I attended the two leading festivals in the field of Oriental Dance and Folklore. Both events were held at Hotels in the Giza District, besides the Great Pyramids site in Cairo. My accommodation was arranged in a triple room, which I shared with other single traveler participants.

I first took part in the Nile Group Festival, which had a gathering of around 120 participants and had a real community feeling to it. The organizers provide us with a high quality event where, teachers, attendees and staff were closely involved professionally and socially. The training program was carefully planned and the amount of participants in each class was limited. The dance sessions were accompanied by live drumming.

The style/subjects I chose to study included Classical Oriental, Awallin, Modern





Oriental and Folklore. I took part in master classes led by Freiz, Lubna Emam, Aida Nour, Liza Laziza, Mohamed Kazafy, Neveen Ramez, Khaled Mahmoud, Dandash, Dr. Farida Fahmy and Dr. Hassan Khalil. It was quite extraordinary to observe closely such a display of artistic generations. I feel that I was able to experience and capture their distinctive vocabularies. I found that these particular teachers are true to their background when it comes to their dancing style and their teaching approaches. I was deeply touched by the “genuine feeling” evoked by the older generation and I was also inspired by the “visions” of the younger artistes. One of the highlights was Dr. Farida Fahmy’s lecture. She told us how legendary figure Mahmoud Reda’s passion for dance resulted in a life dedicated to research and to the creation of an artistic interpretation of the Egyptian folklore, leading to the creation of the country’s first National Ballet. As first ever soloist of the Reda Troupe, she cleared up misunderstandings about the folkloric repertoire and helped us to understand how it has influenced the Oriental Dance style. As the once higher educated daughter of a wealthy and respected family, she gave us a good idea of the intellectual scene of that time, the taboos they faced, the nationalist movement of

the period and the role it has played on the cultural production of the country.

A week later I joined another 840 dance enthusiasts at the Ahlan Wa Sahlan Festival, a highly recommended experience but, it must be said, not always a smooth one. I found it hard to accept the ridiculous number of attendees allowed in the classrooms during the most popular workshops. I did tackle the situation, as I profited immensely from these particular master teachers, but to those who were unfamiliar with the teacher’s style and for those less experienced, it was a different story and it seemed terribly frustrating. There was an impressive number of workshops on offer and some truly worthy teachers.

Dance sessions were accompanied by live drumming. The style/subjects I studied included Classical Oriental, Egyptian Balady, Egyptian Rhythmic Studies and Music interpretation. I took part in master classes led by Momo Kadous, Randa Kamel, Nani Sabri, Yasmina, Asmahan, Diana, Sarah Farouk and Emad El Rashidi. Teaching techniques through the practice of routines and choreography proved to be a popular approach between instructors and to be highly appreciated by attendees. I witnessed genial use of the technique to visually classical music pieces and a more intuitive way of expressing the popular songs. It helped me to understand that in order to be a complete dancer, both approaches, technical and intuitive, should be developed and given the same attention, as each one of them serves its own purpose in the Oriental Dance context.

The highlights of my timetable were the master classes on music interpretation and rhythmic studies, taught by Sarah Farouk and Diana. I have not only deepened my understanding of Egyptian music, but I also learnt new ways of dancing and presenting its rhythmic complexity. I was pleased to receive individual attention during a proposed reflection on improvisation.



Live Performances

These festivals allow its participants to be active, as well as to be a spectator, creating an appropriated environment for both experimentation and reflection. The opportunity to observe several high standard performances accompanied by live Egyptian orchestra was unique and enabled me to analyze several subjects related to Oriental Dance/Music stage performance, such as “table” and choices of repertoire, choreography x improvisation, addition of folkloric numbers and the atmosphere evoked. An earlier reflection and the preparation of a questionnaire helped me keep focus and gave me clear answers while completing the task. Also, by watching so many artistes I witnessed a variety of styles, costume trends and performance concepts. It became clear that a common point between the top dancers is how successful they are in incorporating their personalities and establishing their own style within the Egyptian Oriental Dance form.

Folkloric dance performances took place at the Gala Shows at both festivals. The Egyptian Sufi Tanoura proved to be a very popular number. Regarding the Egyptian Folkloric Ballet, it seems that not much has changed since the establishment of Mahmoud Reda’s repertoire. The Ahlan Wa Sahlan festival presented us with a varied number of folkloric performances, which included the famous Egyptian dancing horses, puppetry, and genuine Gawazze performance. Twice, the Nile Group team treated us with evening programs outside the hotel, where we were able to watch popular theatre and folkloric dance shows and socialize in a more Egyptian atmosphere.



Benefits

By passing through intensive dance training I polished my technique, improved my improvisational ability and learnt new skills. By attending a huge variety of quality dance performances, I did benefit from being exposed to the most traditional as well as modern concepts and contemporary ideas. I have deepened my understanding of the Egyptian folklore and its role in the Oriental dance context, helping me to identify the distinctions between what is authentic and what is artistic interpretation/creation. By integrating an international scene, I experienced intense artistic exchange. I enjoyed professional networking and the results were both immediate and promising long term. The “go and see the practice in the country” experience is one not to be missed by artists who are seriously committed to Egyptian Dance. By immersing myself in the culture, I was able to find explanations to various moods and movement qualities brought into the dance.

Conclusions

Through this experience, I have not only improved my dancing skills but, I have also been inspired and most important, I have grown in confidence. As a performer, teacher and choreographer, I am now aware of what I have already achieved and what I need to work on. I can contextualize my individual practice within this art form. The information and the material that I have collected will be extremely useful for both teaching and creative processes. I have a lot to continue studying with and a lot of experience to pass on.

Joice Marise Santos Pereira