

Nadiyah's is proud to present February's Special Guest Amara  
Instructor and Performer, specializing in American-Middle Eastern Dance

### Amara's Biography

Amara has performed as a soloist and in Middle Eastern Dance companies all over the United States. As a versatile dancer, her repertoire includes traditional and experimental improvisations and choreographies. She has taught courses on dance appreciation and Middle Eastern dance at UCLA and UCR. She has also taught workshops at a number of universities and colleges and has instructed at several dance studios. In addition to teaching, Amara is the Director and Choreographer of Ya Helewa! and Artistic Director of *An Evening of Experimental Middle Eastern Dance*. Amara holds a degree in Music History and Literature and a certificate in Ethnomusicology from The Florida State University and worked towards an M.A. in Dance Ethnology and an M.F.A at UCLA. Currently, she is attending UCR's Ph.D. program in Dance History and Theory where she performs and researches the social, historical, and political positions of Middle Eastern dance in the United States.

Amara has extensive performance experience from 1994 to the present day, including performing for 2003 IAMED's Belly Dance! video recording at the Ford Amphitheater, Los Angeles, CA and for An Evening of Experimental Middle Eastern Dance (2000-2003), Los Angeles, CA. Likewise, she has held extended performing jobs at Elbasha Greek Restaurant (2001-2004), Los Angeles, CA; Pars Persian Restaurant (2001), Los Angeles, CA; and Mamounia Moroccan Restaurant (1995-1997), Las Vegas, NV.

Depending on the venue, Amara's solo performances have included a variety of genres such as cabaret (American, Egyptian, and Turkish), folk, and experimental with additional special sections of sword, veil, double veil, floor work, tray and candles, candelabra, cane, or zils.

Drawing from her courses in dance pedagogy at UCLA and UCR, Amara has instructed through studios, universities, and workshops, and public speaking.

In the studio, Amara stresses a strong foundational technique through combinations of choreography, improvisation, solo, and group work. Students are encouraged to create their own style and are taught to embellish their performances with props such as veil, zils (finger cymbals), cane, and sword. Besides movements, Amara discusses the history of Middle Eastern dance, the differences between various genres, and the issues facing dancers today.

Amara has also taught accredited courses on dance appreciation and Middle Eastern dance at UCLA and UCR. In her Introduction to Dance course, students actively engage with watching dance, developing tools for observing, describing, analyzing, and discussing dance movement and its social contexts. In addition to viewing dance, students learn how to be active audience members. The course covers a variety of dance styles, choreographers, and dancers from around the world. Students also explore examples of how notions of gender, race, and class in different times and locations are played out through and in dance. Students write and discuss dance based upon the required readings, videos, live performances, lecture materials, and in-class discussions. Some examples of Amara's workshops are as follows:

Introductory Middle Eastern Dance Workshop

The introductory dance class is designed for Middle Eastern and non-Middle Eastern dance students (including non-dancers). Best conducted through at least two sessions, the workshop has three main purposes: 1. to enable students to experience and acquire basic posture, technique, and styling through exercises and choreography; 2. to permit students, through solo and group improvisations, to create a community spirit through dancing for and watching others; and 3. to allow students to gain insight into the culture, and to challenge preconceived ideas of the dance form through lectures, discussions, and video clips.

#### Choreography Workshop

For those students who have a basic dance or Middle Eastern dance foundation, Amara teaches from a repertoire including Staged-Folkloric dances (Raks al-'asayah, Debke, Karsilama, and Belediz), and Modern Egyptian (openings, drum solos, and props - veil, double veils, and sword).

#### Taksims Workshop

Through a guided exploration in speed, weight changes and efforts, students can embody and portray the music with their current vocabulary. Though the workshop is geared towards taksims and drum solos, these techniques can easily be transferred to choreography.

#### Group dynamics Workshop

By applying modern improvisational techniques, students experience new ways of moving and moving with others as one moving identity. These techniques can be performed or used as a tool for troupes and classes to become closer and more self-aware.

#### Amara's Response to Nadiyah's Questions

1. What particular styles of Middle Eastern dance (ME) have you studied?

Modern Egyptian, Middle Eastern Folk Dance, American-Middle Eastern Dance

2. Who were your teachers for the ME styles?

Modern Egyptian - Jilliana, Los Angeles, CA

Staged Egyptian Folk Dance - Viviane Hamamdjian, Los Angeles, CA

Middle Eastern Folk Dance - Aisha Ali, Los Angeles, CA; Najia El-Mouzayen, Berkeley, CA

American-Middle Eastern Dance - Fahtiem, Los Angeles, CA; Aegela, Atlanta, GA; Marliza Pons, Las Vegas, NV; Lynette at Snake Skin Studio, Berkeley, CA; Halimeda, Tallahassee, FL; Sally Rubenstein, Tallahassee, FL

3. What ME dancers were most inspiring for you?

All of my teachers have inspired me as they have all added to my individual dance style. Since I have to pick, here are my choices:

- Halimeda for the supportive atmosphere she created in her classes and company;
- Viviane Hamamdjian for her knowledge and expertise in Egyptian Folk dance;
- Aegela for showing me new ways of breaking down movements and pushing me to experiment with layering techniques; and

- Anaheed for continuing to inspire me with not only her skills but her support for the dance through kind words and promotion of the dance in a variety of venues.

4. If your specialty is something other than ME, such as American Tribal or Cabaret, what differences do you see between the ME styles and your preferred dance style?

For the most part, I am hired to perform American-

Middle Eastern dance, which is a conglomeration of various styles I have learned: Turkish and Egyptian cabaret, folklore, and ballet. I also perform experimental works based on Middle Eastern dance.

In a general sense, if Middle Eastern dance can be broken down into movement, music, and costuming; fusion plays with only one of these elements and Experimental Middle Eastern dance plays with at least two (and often) three elements.

Using Middle Eastern dance as the foundation, I have drawn from facets of my life. Most importantly, Experimental Middle Eastern dance allows me to integrate the dance theory and history I have been studying for years into my dance practice.

My research on the different dance styles and other topics are discussed further in the following articles:

- Contemporary Images of the Middle Eastern Dancer in the United States
- Contemporary American Middle Eastern Dance
- Naming The Dance
- Two Representations of American Middle Eastern Dance

5. What classes do you teach? If so, where?

I teach an Advance class in Encino, CA on Saturdays from 11:00 a.m. - 12:30 p.m. I also teach Beginning/ Intermediate class in Encino, CA on Tuesdays from 7:45 p.m. - 9:15 p.m.

6. Do you regularly perform at particular places? If so, where?

I dance every Friday and Saturday night at Elbasha Greek Restaurant, 25810 W. Hemingway Ave., Stevenson Ranch, CA, 661-259-6611.

7. Do you have any special events and/or workshops coming up in 2004?

Ya Helewa! and I will perform at the Ivar Theatre in March.

Desert Sin presents

Musée des Femmes;

Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque

When: March 5-7 & March 12-14, 2004

Where: Ivar Theatre, 1605 Ivar Ave., Hollywood, CA 90028

For more information, visit <http://www.desertsin.com/>.

I will perform at the Rakkasah Cabaret Stage on Sunday, March 21 at 3:40 p.m. with the music group, Solace.

Rakkasah West 2004

When: March 19-21, 2004

Where: Richmond Memorial Auditorium, 27th & Nevin, Richmond, CA

For more information, visit <http://www.rakkasah.com/>

I will take my written doctoral exams April 11-17. -- This is a performance I have been practicing for seven years and is one of the biggest events leading me to the goal of achieving the first Ph.D. in Dance History and Theory with an emphasis in Arabic dance.

Every September, I produce "An Evening of Experimental Middle Eastern Dance" in Los Angeles.

To learn about Experimental Middle Eastern Dance, visit <http://www.eemed.com/>.

(To read reviews of past performances, visit

<http://www.eemed.com/articles.html>.)

To audition for this concert, visit <http://www.eemed.com/auditions.html>.

Biography was written by Amara and edited by Nadiyah.

Thank you, Amara, for sharing your story with us.

To learn more about Amara (Laura Osweiler), visit <http://www.amaradances.com/>

To review her resume, visit [http://www.amaradances.com/bio\\_resume.html](http://www.amaradances.com/bio_resume.html)

To contact her, call 818-906-1947 or 818-634-4700, or email [amara@amaradances.com](mailto:amara@amaradances.com).

Contact Us:

Nadiyah's

P.O. Box 18393,

Spokane, WA 99228

509-993-4423

<mailto:Nadiyah@Nadiyahs.com>