

	<p><b>Raqia Hassan</b> is a renaissance woman in the Oriental dance community. A dancer since the age of four, Madam Raquia rose to stardom as one of the principal dancers in Mahmoud Reda's National Folkloric Troupe of Egypt. She obtained the status of soloist at the young age of 16. Today, with over 30 years of professional experience performing folkloric and Oriental dance, she is praised as a dancer, choreographer and master teacher. A remarkable performer, Raquia has focused her talent on teaching others rather than on the stage. As a result she has trained some of the biggest modern day Egyptian stars. She is credited with the training of such dancers as Dina, Dandash, Mona el Said and Randa Kamal.</p> <p>As one of the most highly sought after Raqs Sharqi choreographers today, Madam Raquia travels extensively, and has in the recent past made stops in Spain, Japan, Korea, China, Sweden, and the United States among others. She also has produced a line of multi volume instructional DVDs, which are highly sought after throughout the world.</p> <p>In her native Egypt, she has, for 12 years, organized the Ahlan wa Sahlan (Hello and Welcome) Festival. The festival is dedicated to bringing together teachers of from all over the world to teach Oriental style dance, a performance technique which is her admitted great passion. Begun on a small scale, Ahlan Wa Sahlan now boasts over thousands of amateur to professional level participants each year, who congregate in Cairo. Madam Raquia and the festival have been at the heart of the Oriental dance community often credited with keeping the art of Egyptian dance alive.</p> <p>In addition to teaching, performing and organizing, Raquia is an accomplished designer with her own line of costumes sold throughout the world. Her glamorous and creative costumes are now the talk of the dance community, echoing once more that she is the creative voice of Oriental Dance!</p> <p>Raqia Hassan of Cairo, Egypt is the most internationally known teacher and choreographer of Egyptian style belly dance in Egypt and the world today. She has her own very unique "Raquia technique" that she currently teaches in her videos and in her dance workshops all over the world. Raquia's teaching style is top notch. She is friendly, professional and patient. She knows just what she is aiming for and is very clear in her explanations. She always has something new in her thrilling choreographies, and her teaching skills are top class.</p> <p>Raqia started dancing at the age of 4. She joined the most esteemed "Reda Troupe" of Egypt at the young age of 16. One year later she became one of the first principal solo dancers with them, an honor achieved by very few dancers. The "Reda Troupe" was the first Egyptian dance company to record Egyptian folk songs and dances and perform them on stage. They became world famous with many followers. Their work has shaped and influenced what is known today as Oriental Dance (Raks Sharki). Later on, Raquia started teaching "Oriental Dance" on her own because that's her true passion and first love.</p> <p>She travels most of the year around the globe for workshops. She is constantly in demand giving workshops in various parts of the world, and is the producer of the highly sought after Raquia Hassan technique videos. Raquia's choreographies are full of interesting moves that are challenging without losing the fun and joie-de-vivre of the true Egyptian style.</p> <p>She is the producer of the annual Ahlan wa Sahlan dance festival in Cairo, Egypt. Almost behind every successful Egyptian style dancer is the name "Raquia Hassan". Madame Raquia has trained Azza Sharif, Mona el Said, Nani, Nelly Fouad, Dina, Amani, Sorraya, Dandash, Randa Kamal, not to mention countless other dancers in Egypt and all over the world.</p>
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Helvetica, sans-serif; font-size: 12px; line-height: 16px; padding-top: 4px; padding-right: 0px; padding-bottom: 4px; padding-left: 0px; margin: 0px;"></p><p style="color: #666666; font-family: Tahoma, Arial, Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; font-size: 12px; line-height: 16px; padding-top: 4px; padding-right: 0px; padding-bottom: 4px; padding-left: 0px; margin: 0px;" class="tagline"><strong>ARTICLES</strong><br /><span style="font-size: 10pt; line-height: 1.3em; color: #333333; font-family: Tahoma, Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif;"><br /><strong>RAQIA HASSAN TO THE RESCUE</strong></span><span style="line-height: 150%; color: #333333; font-family: Tahoma, Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif;"></span></p><p><span style="font-size: 10pt;">By HABIBA<br /></span></p><table border="0" style="width: 718px; height: 1271px;"><tr><td></td><td><span style="text-indent: 30px; font-size: 10pt;"> It's been two years since Raqia Hassan has been in New York and a lot has happened. Belly Dance as we know it has been a casualty of the Egyptian revolution. Music and dance, however, has not disappeared but has gone to the street as an expression of the people. While here, in the US, for those of us who have felt totally cut off from Egypt because of the recent troubles, there was relief. It came in the form of the dynamo that is Raqia Hassan. The architect of modern Egyptian belly dance came to rescue us. It was a breath of fresh air, an honor and a privilege to see Raqia again. With all of the difficulties attendant to life in Egypt and the present confrontational politics, it is a tribute to her tenacity that she is still going strong.</span><span style="text-indent: 30px; font-size: 10pt; color: #343434;">Her festival, <i>Ahlan Wa Sahlan</i>, will be celebrating its 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary next year. She has continued to literally keep the dance alive in Egypt and all over the world.<br /><span style="color: #000000; font-family: Verdana, Arial, Helvetica, sans-serif; line-height: normal; text-indent: 30px; font-size: 13px;"> Those of us lucky enough to be there owe a big thank you to Nourhan Sharif who presented her in New York City, Oct. 5th and 6</span><sup style="color: #000000; font-family: Verdana, Arial, Helvetica, sans-serif; line-height: normal; text-indent: 30px;">th</sup><span style="color: #000000; font-family: Verdana, Arial, Helvetica, sans-serif; line-height: normal; text-indent: 30px; font-size: 13px;">, 2013. It was Raqia's only US stop this year.<br /><br /><span style="color: #262626; font-family: Verdana, Arial, Helvetica, sans-serif; font-size: 13px; line-height: normal; text-indent: 30px;"> </span><span style="color: #262626; font-family: Verdana, Arial, Helvetica, sans-serif; font-size: 13px; line-height: normal; text-indent: 30px;"><span style="font-family: Verdana, Arial, Helvetica, sans-serif; line-height: normal; text-indent: 36px; font-size: 10pt; color: #262626;"></span></span></span></span></span><br /></span></td><tr><td colspan="2"><p style="text-indent: 27pt;"><span style="color: #343434; font-size: 10pt; text-indent: 27pt; line-height: 1.3em;"><span style="color: #343434; font-family: Verdana, Arial, Helvetica, sans-serif; font-size: 13px; line-height: 17.333332061767578px; text-indent: 36px;"><span style="font-family: Verdana, Arial, Helvetica, sans-serif; font-size: 13px; line-height: normal; text-indent: 30px; color: #262626;">To say that Raqia is inspiring barely covers it. She can articulate and communicate her vision of the dance and has defied the prevailing conservative cultural climate in Egypt to disseminate it and is the single most recognized figure in Oriental Dance today. She has trained several generations of Egyptian dancers and has paved the way for other teachers, by giving them the forum of the </span><i style="font-family: Verdana, Arial, Helvetica, sans-serif; font-size: 13px; line-height: normal; text-indent: 30px; color:

Ahlan Wa Sahlan and others festivals she organizes. Madame Raqia has trained Azza Sharif, Mona el Said, Nani, Nelly Fouad, Dina, Amani, Soraya, Dandash and Randa Kamal, to name a few.

Nourhan Sharif first brought Raqia to New York in 1995 and has been bringing her ever since. Nourhan remembers: She was full of life and ideas and so much passion. She has made the Egyptian Festival a reality. . . she made Randa, Dina, Soroya and now Aziza.

When I had my first workshop with her, she was so energetic she danced younger dancers under the table. She had a whole new approach to teach us. She never walked through the choreographies with us as some teachers do. She lived them.

She used contractions and camels as punctuation. She taught us to intensify hip movements with the leg and knee. She insisted the lyrics be interpreted in dance. She used the compressed internal emotion of the core. And she explained why. The layering, the knee shimmy, the camel, the opposite, the out and the in- we loved it all. The technique was fabulous and the choreographies were either big and bold or exquisite and emotional.

In 1995 in an interview with Shareen El Safy, Raqia, she laid out her philosophy. Asked by Shareen, How has the Oriental dance changed most recently? She answered, Now the dancers are going back to the Belly Dance. Three or four years ago we made only Oriental, with some steps and some movements, but now for every step, we put it inside the belly. (Habibi v. 14, no. 1 Winter 1995)

<http://thebestofhabibi.com/vol-14-no-1-winter-1995/raqia-hassan/>

I went to Cairo to study with her in 1998 and experienced the hectic bus station atmosphere that was her living room. Simultaneously phone calls, teaching, visitors, and deals being made, and she was everywhere. Anyone who is anyone camped out

in her living room. Since then I have taken her classes whenever I can. She has a basic philosophy but there are new ideas every time.

In October, in addition to two choreographies, she emphasized the following principles of her technique:

- her method goes back to an earlier style that uses the belly as the emotional center.
- the dancer should strive for clarity in her movements so it all doesn't look alike. There is more variety when the audience can see a clear difference, for example, between a circle or a (figure) 8
- the plie belongs in folklore not oriental dance, especially when it comes to shimmies.
- there is an oriental arabesque and a ghawazi arabesque.
- the knee can intensify not only hip movements but abdominal movements as well.
- hip twists can be more powerful than the hip drop.
- there are three types of pas de bourree: ghawazi (changes side to side), folklore (a la Reda) and oriental (often with a shoulder or hip accent).
- don't rest the non-weight bearing foot on point as in ballet-the power of the foot and knee is lost.

And finally:

- be yourself. The dancer must adapt what she learns to her own style and personality.

She is incredible in that she always has a new perspective on the movements, also in that she takes the time to give special attention to less experienced dancers. They may not come away with the choreography but leave with an understanding of the technique, which she articulates with great clarity.

Raqia avoids the formulaic choreography of a lot of the other Egyptian teachers, in which repetition of combinations along with the music is used to string together the unique parts. Originally I was driven mad by the lack of symmetry in her choreographies. Other Egyptian teachers teach in sections that are keyed to a certain refrain in the music. With Raqia, the lead foot keeps changing and there is much less repetition. Instead of an A/B/A/B arrangement, it very often is A/B/B/A. This makes composed choreographies look so natural they seem improvised.

In October Raqia taught two choreographies, one a genteel (her word) *shaabi* and a *raks sharqi* to a pop song.

The first was to *Ah ya dunia*, a shaabi piece by the singer Bosy, the song was, according to Raqia, a lament about life under the repression of the post-revolutionary Egyptian government. Having originally choreographed it while President Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood was in power, it was a cry of the heart against repression. After the fall of Morsi she changed the choreography to a celebration of artistic freedom. This mixture of politics and music is not uncommon in shaabi music.

The second piece was set to a love song sung by Bahaa Sultan: *Zay Mahnar* (Let's stay the way we are, my love).

In July 2014, Nourhan will bring back her Egyptian Academy of Oriental Dance weeklong workshop with Raqia Hassan as the main teacher. Aziza, Soroya and (new to the US) Ibrahim Suesse will also teach.

I, for one, am grateful that these people are willing to come and teach

us. </span><span style="font-size: 10pt; color: #343434;">We need to support our Egyptian sisters and brothers in the industry.</span></p> <p style="text-indent: 22.5pt;"> </p> </td></tr> </table> <p style="line-height: 150%;"> </p> <p><span style="font-size: 10pt; color: #262626;"><span style="text-indent: 22.5pt; font-size: 10pt; line-height: 1.3em;">For more information </span><a href="http://www.egyptianacademy.com/" style="text-indent: 22.5pt; font-size: 10pt; line-height: 1.3em;"><span style="color: #244786;">www.egyptianacademy.com</span></a><br />Questions call Sharifwear at 718-726-0526</span></p> <p style="line-height: 150%;"> </p> <p><span style="font-size: 10pt; color: #262626;">Email: <a href="mailto:Sharifwear@aol.com">Sharifwear@aol.com</a></span></p> <p style="line-height: 150%;"><span style="font-size: 14pt; line-height: 150%; color: #343434;"> </span></p> <p> <strong style="line-height: 1.3em;"><span style="color: #ea5515; font-size: small;">Beige Luciano-Adams</span></strong></p> <p> </p> <p><strong>S</strong>itting on the steps of the Mena House Oberoi Hotel in Haram, I am privy to some colorful human traffic: A middle-aged Russian woman with magenta highlights, arm tattoos and a snug, powder-blue training suit, is weeping. Her companion, a rotund, daffodil-colored girl in a matching dress makes a few futile attempts at consolation, which all but dissipate in the staid July heat.</p> <p align="left">Somehow, it seems inevitable that mascara will run, hair extensions fly, and scandal enjoy free reign. What do you expect when you put 1,200 bellydancers from all over the world in a five-star hotel at the foot of the Pyramids?</p> <p align="left">Welcome to Ahlan wa Sahlan Oriental Dance Festival, the annual extravaganza of bellydance shows, sales and lessons that drowns the historic Mena House in its own glamorous ecosystem of exaggerated femininity and utter camp.</p> <p align="left">An American couple in ecru safari sets is visibly lost amid the glittering carnage. They approach the bell captain, who is dressed, presumably for their benefit, in a fez and pantaloons. ♦Where is McDonalds? Can we get a taxi to McDonalds?♦ Ya Captain! The captain is otherwise occupied, watching a quartet of cute Korean girls in evening gowns as they pass him on the stairs.</p> <p align="left">I am here to interview the one-and-only Madame Raqia Hassan, master choreographer and bellydance mogul, on the last day of the week-long international festival that she almost single-handedly runs, now in its eighth year.</p> <p align="left">Among bellydancers, Raqia Hassan is a living legend, an approachable deity. Starting as a folkloric dancer in the heydays of the Reda Troupe, she has since built her reputation as the art♦s best choreographer. Dancers come from all corners of the globe to take classes in her small home studio ♦ but this temple has an entrance fee.</p> <p align="left">Hassan has made a seamless transition from artist to businesswoman. In fact, the latter title doesn♦t quite do justice to the magnitude of her enterprising activities. She is solely responsible for reviving the nation♦s bellydancing industry, building on the rich legacy of Egypt♦s golden era to confirm Cairo as the undisputed hub of Oriental dance.</p> <p align="left">Inside the Mena House, corridor after corridor opens up in a brazen show of color and light, bare midriffs and false eyelashes, silicone and cash, cash, cash. Vendors ply their wares in closed stalls or on tables and racks crowding the narrow hallways. Tablas, jewelry, golden Saidi canes, CDs, DVDs, photos and costumes. Every last patch of white wall and square of carpet is obscured by an ongoing rhinestone and sequin dialogue. The gods have given spandex a second chance. Somewhere, someone has let Saad El-Sughayar into their boom box and he won♦t leave.</p> <p align="left">It doesn♦t take long to find Madame Raqia.

Visibly exhausted but characteristically jovial, she sits down in a golden chair in front of the hotel's main ballroom. The position is temporary; in less than a minute she'll be up and walking briskly toward her next task, stopped a thousand times along the way by people with questions, requests, answers and some who just wish to sidle up to her celebrity aura and bask for a few minutes.

I'm tired, she smiles at me weakly, almost beatific. I tell her the photographer wants to shoot her and she says OK, but better at eight o'clock when I'm dressed, motioning toward a well-kept doorman with a diamond-heavy hand. (As if plucked from the celluloid, Hassan has a Chihuahua named Chocolata, blond hair and a penchant for Jackie-O sunglasses and animal prints).

The photographer can't stay, we protest. She says, still smiling, yalla, OK.

Well, we want a natural picture, are you working? Can we follow you?

My only work now is just overseeing classes. OK let's go.

She takes us to another gilded ballroom where more than 50 dancers are gathered for class with a male bellydance teacher from Spain, no less and says, stay as long as you like, as she escapes through the back door. I'm going upstairs to rest. So much for the photo.

As it turns out, the interview didn't happen that day either. I went to her home later, to the heavily trafficked living room where people, Egyptian and foreign, cross paths day and night: a grand central station of sorts for the dance business.

**Nebedi Minein El-Hekaya?**

Hassan's story is an interesting one. She began her career more than 30 years ago as a folkloric dancer with the Reda Troupe. I learned a lot from Reda, I learned folklore but I didn't like it, this is not my feeling. When I started teaching [Oriental dance] I felt, this is my way.

But unlike most, Hassan bypassed the stage for teaching. How she built up a name and became the most sought-after Oriental dance choreographer in the business without the prerequisite soloist career is quite remarkable, and attests to both the quality of her work, and an evident tenacity a feature that surges periodically under a sugar crust of demure expression.

My name comes from my work. Normally the teacher has to be a dancer. People go to her class because they've seen her dance. Me, I started to teach, and the people knew me from my teaching, and from my students. I started to teach people who were or became famous, this is my good luck, tabaan.

Indeed, she has trained an entire new generation (or two) of bellydancers, both Egyptian and foreign, Dina among them. After the age of superstars like Nagwa Fouad, Fifi Abdo and Sohair Zaki, Egyptian Oriental dance paused briefly, faced with a transition to an increasingly conservative society and a waning popularity therein. Forever a socially stigmatized art form, it has always made up in popularity what it lacked in legitimacy. Now, with the international recognition it receives a phenomenon for which Madame Raqia is largely responsible the dance form is still a taboo industry, but one that is slowly carving a new position and legitimacy for itself in an increasingly globalized society.

What is so remarkable about Hassan's contribution is that she has made the most traditional Egyptian dance widely accessible to a global audience without compromising the cultural integrity of the art form. She combines baladi and classical movements, raqessa (dance performer) and raqassa (bellydancer), reflecting the evolution of Oriental dance from ghawazi (traditional bellydancers) to Hollywood (bellydance is reputed have originated over 200 years ago with the Ghawazi, but found its most iconic expression in the golden age of Egyptian cinema, when Western influences and professionalization transformed the trade). While expanding and promoting this gem of Egyptian culture, Hassan has managed

to redefine its aesthetic characterization, at the same time preserving the heritage of Egyptian dance for future generations.

**Ahlan wa Sahlan**

Begun eight years ago with only 120 participants, Hassan's annual festival is a perfectly globalized village, which has grown to 1,200 participants from 55 countries, all offering their take on Egyptian dance – taking and teaching lessons, competing, performing, buying, selling and shamelessly self-promoting. Next year, Hassan says, they will have to move the festival to another location, as the ample halls and ballrooms of the Mena House were a bit tight for us this year.

When asked how she thinks the festival has grown so much since its inception, Hassan offers that, the Americans grow so much, alluding to the fact that much of the industry has grown up in diaspora, largely in the US. This year, however, some insiders observed that Western European and US participation has waned, with Asians and Russians filling in the numbers.

With a sharp eye for opportunity, Madame Raqia traveled to China this year to teach workshops (People love it!). While Japanese niche interest in the form has been established over the past couple of decades, interest in Korea and Taiwan is on the rise. Booming business in Latin America, Western Europe and the US is nothing new, but the figures of dance tourism and costume sales seem to multiply exponentially.

Though the festival numbers (1,200 dance students; 83 instructors, many of them foreign; and at least 35 vendors selling costumes that average \$400 a piece) signal big profits, Hassan admits that she lost money in the beginning. I lost like LE 15,000, but I didn't care because the money comes from the dance. When I like something, I have to do it very well. I love this dance, so I have to do my best.

As far as changing attitudes or obstacles within Egyptian society, Hassan seems pleased with her achievements. I think now they [Egyptians] respect it more because of all the people who come here, and the international festival. I think the government they are so happy with me. We make great tourism. It's good business for Egypt, she says.

Indeed, the economic impact of 1,200 relatively wealthy, specialized tourists will not likely go unnoticed. In addition to what they spend at the festival, many dance tourists stay on in Egypt to take classes; this translates to vital tourist spending on lodging and transportation, Nile cruises and tours, entertainment and shopping sprees at Khan El-Khalili.

Though she seems to manage the whole operation herself, a week-long event of daunting proportions that takes months of planning, Hassan does have help, from my family and from many people outside. We are like an army.

Hassan's pace is truly dizzying. She doesn't stop moving, there are people in her house day and night, and if she's not teaching or making deals here in Cairo then she's on a plane somewhere.

Do you ever take time off? I ask her.

I feel I'm on vacation when I travel to teach. I feel I'm on holiday then because someone orders me you will do this, you will do that, this time you are busy, this time you rest, this time we make a-shopping. I don't think. When I don't think, this is my holiday. If I'm on holiday here and still having to think about all this, it's not really a vacation.

So far this year, she has been to Japan, China, Italy, Sweden, Spain, the US everywhere! she says brightly. I will go to Italy again, to France, England, Russia and maybe next year to Puerto Rico or Mexico.

Will you ever retire?

No, she says, laughing. Yaani, until now, of course I'm tired because this work is hard for me, but when I get too tired I will stop everything. But until now, alhamdulillah, I'm not. I'm very happy with what I've done, and very excited about the future. If I love my work, and it's growing, then I won't stop. But if something upsets me, then I will

stop.◆</p> <p align="left">Needless to say, being a woman in a position of power in a socially stigmatized industry cannot be easy. One can only imagine the struggles she has emerged from.</p> <p align="left">We can only imagine, because she shrugs it off, declining to complain about the bad times. Instead, like any seasoned performer, she leaves us a little healthy mystery to contemplate, surely knowing that her work speaks for itself. <span class="Signature">et</span></p> <p><span style="font-family: Tahoma, Arial, Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; color: #666666; font-size: small;"><span style="font-size: 11px; line-height: 16px;"><strong> </strong></span></span></p> <p>For more information on training with this artist in New York Clty, please contact Nourhan Sharif at: <a href="mailto:Nourhan@aol.com" title="mailto:Nourhan@aol.com">Nourhan@aol.com</a></p>