

Belly Dance and Hieroglyphics - New/Old Dance for Grand Opera

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January 23, 2006 (FPRC) -- BelCobraDance, a Hollywood based fusion dance company, is preparing a new dance work set to the "ballet" music from Verdi's Aida, using jazz and belly dance movement styles and Egyptian hieroglyphics- and choreographed by a male belly dancer.

Unlike typical opera productions, in which local ballet or modern dance companies are recruited to dance choreography which often has little or no relation to the story line or to the historical milieu, the BelCobraDance venture takes the new/old tack of creating dance for an opera that relates both movement style (belly dance) and thematic content (Egyptian hieroglyphics) to the story line and historical context of Aida. Why is it new? Because virtually no attempts to fuse modern American belly dance with advanced jazz technique have been made- it is extremely difficult to find dancers capable of putting in the time to master movements of such different dance styles. Why is it old? Because dance fusion has always been around, and dance fusion for the purpose of closely connecting the dance with a historical context was a frequent goal of early American modern dance pioneers such as Ted Shawn and Ruth St. Denis, directors of the early modern dance company Denishawn.

BelCobraDance Artistic Director Rick Heiman is using Hollywood jazz dancers with little or no experience in belly dance. He has to help them quickly reach a solid foundation in belly dance in order to create a new movement vocabulary, one in which the seemingly antagonistic movement styles of jazz dance and belly dance become intimately intertwined in a truly organic "synthesis." Dancers are required to take company class before rehearsals, and comments such as "this is really hard!" and "how can you get your body to do that?" are frequent in class drills.

BelCobraDance works quickly: "The ballet music from Aida can be analyzed as sequences of 8 counts, just like pop music," says Rick. "This is the fastest and simplest way to make it accessible to dancers, who have trained with 8 counts all their lives and hence know where they are in the choreography at all times." Additionally, one of Rick's most notable belly dance teachers has been the world famous Suhaila Salimpour, a former dancer with the Belly Dance Superstars, and from Suhaila Rick learned how to teach belly dance in reference to basic muscular actions, using commands like "Contract the obliques!" and "Use the lower back in pelvic locks!" to break the movement, like the music, down into easily grasped parts.

BelCobraDance rehearses regularly in Hollywood, and dance and entertainment industry professionals and members of the press are welcome to visit rehearsals and see works in progress by this unique fusion dance company. It is anticipated that the Aida dance will have its first public performance sometime in Spring 2006.

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