

Of Canes and Taps

– Something Old and Something New

The Yalla! International Oriental Dance Festival 2002 is over, the feet are sore and swollen but, once again, the sweaty five days in Helsinki were well worth it – I say five days, as the four-day event got an early start already on Wednesday on the open air stage in the Esplanade Park. I had thought to begin my festival experience quietly, enjoying other dancers' performances but, instead, found myself – after a number of byways and some hysterical moments of composing a text to speak – on stage staring at the microphone that was glaring challengingly right back at me. Pulling my hair must have helped as I managed to announce the event to the point. Afterwards, I awarded myself with an ice-cream.

The actual work started early next morning with **Mahmoud Reda's** teacher workshop. In addition to all the other challenges, we learned a clog dance, which – instead of using the centre – concentrated on using the (at this stage imaginary) clogs. My brain was almost literally on fire, as I really had to think about the footwork. After two days of this, I could feel every single step and tap in my leg muscles...

Thursday and Friday afternoons were spent teaching my own cane dance workshop. The group of students was relatively small so we had ample room to swing the canes. We managed to go through the dance with some time to spare for polishing and at least I thought we had a lot of fun. I wouldn't mind teaching at a big festival again!

The show is an experience

On Friday, after a quick shower, I had to dash to the light rehearsal at the Savoy Theatre. Surprisingly, I still had some time to pop in a store to get some provender before any serious action. It was especially nice to once again be backstage experiencing all the fuss the audience will never see: the dressing rooms full of dancers doing their make-up and hair, one dancer looking for safety-pins (which, instead of diamonds, are really the girl's best friends!), one struggling to attach her false lashes, one staring in the mirror to see if it would be a good idea to still add some rouge...

Amidst all this rush each of us still had time to pop on the stage as well as sit in the front to see the others rehearse. I think that nothing compares to experiencing the show atmosphere as one of the performers.

With a little help from sports drink

My weekend was spent entirely on **Raqia Hassan's** workshops: the haul was some great technique and a partial choreography from the level-one workshop and a beautiful Warda-choreography from the level-three workshop.

During the afternoon I found by experience, how important it is to drink sufficiently: unless you do, the muscles feel limp, the head is empty and learning new things seems an impossible task. Fortunately someone has invented sports drinks – and you're good to go again!

Amidst all the action, Yalla! Festival once again offered new and memorable experiences, the absolute top being the party with live music. Not to mention all the beautiful, energetic and touching dance performances we were privileged to see. Thank you Masrah Association for once again letting me join the happy crowd of dancers!

Photo

Despite a full festival programme, Anu had time to stop and browse the CDs. Photo by Inka Vilén

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