

Dancing Cairo Style

Early in 2003, a group of Masrah Association dancers started to train several choreographies by **Mahmoud Reda**. The aim was the Yalla! International Oriental Dance Festival 2004 when the male dancers of the Mahmoud Reda Troupe would come to Finland to perform with us. Each of us Masrah ladies had several other projects during that time but we all still managed to find time to train together as well.

The luckiest – or the wealthiest – travelled to Cairo in the summer of 2003 to try out the co-operation in advance. The training intensified during the late winter 2004 when we continued to train hard in Helsinki. Some of us, the ones living in Turku, trained at home and travelled at least once a month to Helsinki to be intensely scrutinised. The show slowly began to take form.

The feeling was sky-high during the Yalla! week, as the final training spurt began. To begin with, everybody both here in Finland and in Cairo had been training with recorded music. Then the boys and the musicians arrived and the whole project kicked into a new gear! If you've only danced with "surrogate men" (that is, women dancing the men's part) before, it is difficult to imagine what real masculine energy will do to the dance. Both the boys and the band were true professionals, so the co-operation went smoothly from the start: somehow we all managed to find the same tune.

Up till the actual show, we girls had never even glimpsed the boys' costumes. At the venue, during the dress rehearsal, we were in full costume whereas the boys' costumes were still fighting with the iron and the creases. If the boys were handsome in their training clothes, they took the breath away in their costumes. Some of us lost our heads a little perhaps...

What energy! Some sparks flew already at the rehearsal but the actual performance was so loaded with energy that we never would have needed any hair curlers at all. The dances took over and the music carried us through the show as if on wings. The most memorable moment must be after the finale, as we stood there in the wings waiting to go on stage to take the bow. 'Listen' I said. 'It's raining' said **Peppina Lindfors**, with a twinkle

in her eye. And indeed: the applause sounded like a pouring rain and a thunderstorm and they never seemed to end.

The evening was surely unique for all of us, the dancers and the musicians alike and the good-byes next evening were rather emotional. We wait and hope for the next time...

Photo: Who gets the *fez*, Taikku Hyvönen or Mohamed el Hosseney?

Photo: Harri Paavola

The original Finnish article was published in Ishtar Magazine 4/2004 (www.ishtar.fi). This article has been slightly modified by the author to accommodate the English speaking reader.