

## CIE LEILA HADDAD

### *Zikrayat*

Théâtre du Trianon, Paris

The rain may have been bucketing down on the Boulevard Rochechouart, but inside the intimate Théâtre du Trianon the packed house was swept off to a far more intoxicating place.

Born in Tunisia, Leila Haddad has been pioneering oriental dance – or raqs el sharqi – for the past decade or so and, in a fervent endeavour to raise its unsavoury nightclub status, has always insisted on performing in theatres. She has just re-worked her 2000 creation *Zikrayat*, which takes its title from Oum Kalsoum's famous 1956 song, *Zikrayat (Qisattou Houbbi)* – or *Memories (The Story of my Love)* – inspired by one of Ahmed Rami's poems. The piece is billed as a homage to the Egyptian-born Kalsoum (1904 – 1975), who is a legend throughout the Arab world.

In addition to Haddad, her company comprises eight other dancers, and one of the joys of oriental dance is that one doesn't need to be a bean-pole to participate. Some of the women are generously endowed and yet they move with a mercurial grace. Flesh, one concludes, is no disgrace here.

The programme takes the form of a series of dances including solos, groups and even a sample of raqs assaya – a traditional stick dance – performed by a turbaned man. Oriental dance, however, is really designed for women, and Haddad's dancers luxuriate in abdominal shimmies and hip rotations which could cause a tidal wave.

The costumes are not for wallflowers. Metres of sequined fabric, in every imaginable colour, are used to create a kaleidoscopic sea of swirling skirts and shawls – some tied around the hips, others billowed to great theatrical effect. Much of *Zikrayat* is truly dazzling and, with mint tea served in the interval, this brief voyage to an Arab land was complete.

Emma Manning

