

DANCE

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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

