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Oriental dance has the place of honour

Leila Haddad is a pioneer. Like Isadora Duncan who extolled free dance or Argentina who introduced flamenco to the theatre stage, Leila Haddad wants to get Oriental dance out of family celebrations and "cabarets where it was losing its soul" and put it on theatre stages. A struggle that starts with a change of terminology to which corresponds a change of mentality.

It is no longer about what used to be called "belly dance" with much ignorance and some contempt, but on the contrary the recovery and the evolution of a thousand-year-old art, heir to the Egyptian or Mesopotamian sacred dances. In order to raise the public's awareness but avoid being categorized as ethnic dance, the choreographer of Tunisian origin has developed a technique and works all over by training dancers and creating shows.

Zikrayat, a choreography for nine female dancers and one male dancer, is a self-evident demonstration that Oriental dance is an art in its own right, far beyond the folklore in which it remained confined for so long. With Oum Kalsoum's voice and a music close to trance, Haddad has constructed a long danced poem in tribute to the great diva of song.

With Zikrayat, the name of a poem written for Oum Kalsoum, Haddad succeeds in creating a dreamlike atmosphere sometimes close to ecstasy, where the sparkling colours of the costumes, the intoxicating music and the serpentine movement answer each other mysteriously as in a secret dialogue. It is a pleasure to the eyes and ears, a bath of vitality. The audience was not mistaken in giving her a standing ovation.

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