

## LE PARISIEN

### Leila Haddad's Oriental Dreams

With her slim figure, her red dreadlocks, her short outfits and her high boots, Leila Haddad is everything except a belly dancer. The queen of Oriental Dance who is going to occupy the spacious Trianon Theatre from tonight and for two weeks and two shows, intensely dislikes this restrictive term invented in the 19th century by Napoleon's legionnaires based in Cairo, Egypt.

Tunisian of Syrian origin by her father, she has incarnated Oriental femininity on stages all over the world since the 80s. And everything in her attitude aims at imposing Oriental dance, Raqs El Sharqi in Arabic, as a major art form.

#### Woman's freedom

"My grandmother dances better than me" Leila Haddad likes to joke. It is within the family, with my mother, my grandmother and my aunts that I learned to dance Raqs El Sharqi, but we also have to get this art out of villages." She struggled to make known the thousand-year old richness of her Arab-Berber culture, and in the mid-80s she started the first Oriental dance class in Paris where she continues teaching.

"European students who have a different relationship with their body from Oriental students discover a new continent: their body" she says. In Oriental dance, you accept your body as it is, young or old, without making it suffer, without any movement against it. It is more a self-seduction relationship than a seduction relationship with somebody. It also teaches olidarity between women.

#### A tribute to the Arab people and its diva

With "Zikrayat", literally "Memory", Leila Haddad pays tribute to Oum Kalsoum, the renowned singer who succeeded in bringing together the Arab-Berber peoples. Performed at the Trianon theatre from 14th to 19th February with the music and voice of the great diva, this choreography for 9 dancers traces the career of the girl who came from a modest background and who started to sing on popular stages at the age of 13, dressed up as a boy, before becoming The Star of the East. A way to reproduce on stage the atmosphere of Middle-Eastern towns and to transport us to the poor quarters of the city where Oum Kalsoum grew up.

#### Back to the origins of the world

Leila Haddad explains "in Africa and in Arab countries the person who doesn't know how to dance is an insane body. People dance within their family, at celebrations, on all occasions, at all ages, all generations mixed together and to the same music, whatever social background they belong to. And it is Women who carry this immemorial message. Her body has not forgotten primitive rituals praising the union of the earth with the sky, the sunrise and the sunset, the mysteries of nature and fertility, women's magic power...With the show "In the Footsteps of the Ghawazee" Leila Haddad becomes the heiress of immemorial sacred dances. Accompanied by 9 Gipsy musicians from Upper Egypt, barefoot, wearing lively colours, she links traditions of Mediterranean countries from Turkey to Spain, Iran and Lebanon.

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