

THE MONTREAL EXPERIENCE

Wow. The city is beautiful, the people are friendly, and I got to stay at a rented studio apartment.

While strolling around Old Montreal admiring some of its architecture and history, I came upon the Cirque du Soleil grounds, and they were opening a new show to celebrate its 25th anniversary. I was fortunate to get one of the last two remaining tickets! The new show's name is *OVO*, which means *EGG* in portuguese, and the main director this year is a dancer from Brazil. So, even before the workshops and shows began I had 2 days filled with incredible experiences. I imagine you are familiar with the Cirque. If you haven't been to a live show you are missing one of the greatest shows on earth. It is sheer creativity and expansion of what we consider normal human capabilities.

Now, on to the event that took me to Montreal: A weekend of workshops and shows sponsored by Dee Dee Asad of Little Egypt. The instructors were the stars Randa Kamal, Dr. Mo Geddawi and Nagwa Fouad. It had been a while since I had taken Egyptian style dance workshops and I realized how much I missed it! It was really a rediscovery to study with three great masters of completely different styles. From the intense energy of Randa's combinations, to the traditional fluid moves to Dr. Geddawi, to the "feel the music" approach of Nagwa Fouad, there was so much to learn and assimilate in a short time. But it was like a transfusion for my soul. I loved every minute.

I was able to see the performances of the participants in the Queen of the Nile competition, which was a new experience. I was impressed at the cordiality and support the participants shared with each other, with everyone helping everyone with costumes, make-up, etc. I could not tell who was preparing to dance for the show later and who was competing. I thought that all the participants were lovely and obviously worked hard to prepare for this event.

Something very noticeable to me was that most of the performers in the show were in troupes. In fact, there only 3 soloists. I did not sense any "cliqueness" and all the troupe members chatted with us and were extremely friendly and helpful. I really felt very welcome and never felt like an outsider as sometimes it happens since I often go all over the place alone. I

enjoyed all the dances immensely. Most dances were traditional either in the Raks Sharqi style or folkloric. The fusion dances were based on traditional styles of the dances interpreted. Unless I missed a dance, during the whole weekend I do not recall seeing an experimental dance or tribal. I was intrigued as to why. I was energized by Randa Kamel's intensity in her dance, and inspired by the cameo dance by Nagua Fouad. I was a bit disappointed by not seeing Dr. Mo Geddawi present a folkloric dance for us. Perhaps it is not customary for him to perform on stage, but I was still expecting a dance or two by him.

Dee Dee's organization and calm amidst all the duress due to anything that can go wrong in an event like this, especially when organized in a different country was amazing. Everything was carefully planned, and Dee Dee never once showed stress to the participants. She always had time to answer questions, soothe the spirit of nervous dancers and make sure that everyone's needs were being met. I was thoroughly impressed with everything and hope to be able to attend another of her events in the future, and I recommend that you check them out. She often brings big stars from Egypt and other countries to various parts of the USA and Canada, and this presents a great opportunity for those unwilling or unable to travel overseas.

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