



BELEDI BEAT



A publication of Jawaahir Dance Company and The Cassandra School

2018: Volume 26, Number 4 Fall



Note from Cassandra

Closing in on the “crunch” time for our upcoming concert, I see the beauty in the results of the hard work the Jawaahir dancers have put in. The representative works of Um Kalthoum are stunning! I am so very happy to be working with lighting designer Jeff Bartlett again; I think he understands the Jawaahir aesthetic so very well – always captures the moods in lighting. We are pleased to once again welcome Michael Ibrahim, the director of the National Arab Orchestra as our inspirational musical guest!

Paying Homage to the *Voice of Egypt*, Um Kalthoum

Cassandra Shore has said on many occasions that the singer Um Kalthoum has meant “everything” to her. She owes her greatest inspiration to Um Kalthoum as an artist, motivating a life-long dedication to Arab music and dance. This season’s annual Jawaahir show, [*The Voice of Egyptian Dance: A Tribute to Um Kalthoum*](#), held Dec 6-9, 2018, is dedicated to honoring one of the greatest voices of any generation.

“Even though Um Kalthoum is one of the 20th century’s most singular artists, I’m aware that not everyone is familiar with Um Kalthoum, or has heard her voice,” she said. Cassandra decided that she would focus on the singer’s incomparable voice and artistic persona in the upcoming show. “Once you have heard it, it is unforgettable.” Cassandra has spent the past year immersed in research to present Um Kalthoum’s vocal power and personality to local audiences.

Um Kalthoum was one of those legendary figures that only comes around once in a great while. She is revered for her deeply resonant voice and powerfully moving songs. Um Kalthoum also cultivated an immediately recognizable rock star presence—signature sunglasses, beehive hairdo, gowns and scarves. And when it comes to rock stars, she is publicly admired by Bob Dylan, Maria Callas, Bono, and Robert Plant, who recognize her artistic genius. Yet her legacy lives deep in the heart and soul of the Arab world.



Young Um Kalthoum

Um Kalthoum was born in 1904 in a small village in the Nile Delta of Egypt, and she was quickly recognized as a prodigy. Her father, the local imam, was teaching her older brother to sing when she easily absorbed the same lessons and sang. Recognizing her talent immediately, he included her in the family singing group, dressing her as a boy to deflect disapproval because a girl singing in public was frowned upon. This way he could support his very talented daughter and protect her from criticism.

The family traveled the whole of the delta region singing both religious songs and music for celebrations. As a musical group, they were hired widely in their area, and their reputation grew. Soon Um Kalthoum attracted the attention of influential people wanting to lure her to Cairo.

In 1923, the composer Zakariyya Ahmed invited her to stay in Cairo to meet with agents and teachers who would help further her career. Her family was nervous about letting her go as a solo artist, but she eschewed the typical performer lifestyle and remained tied to her village roots and conservative values. Yet in

Cairo she left the vestiges of her boyhood impersonation, blossoming into a female artist in her own right.

By the 1930s, her fame was soaring throughout the Middle East. With the dedication of Egyptian composers, notably the poet Ahmad Rami (who wrote 137 songs for her) audiences connected with her in a deeply emotional way. They could relate especially to the songs that illuminated the inner life of the heart. Her singing touched everyone, from peasants to royalty.

It's the resonant quality of her very being—her ardent expression—that moves everyone who encounters her music. "One of the things I always do is go to the original recordings of the songs and look at video. You can hear a lot of clues to her feelings through the music and see her facial expression, the movement of her hands and how she projects her voice." Every "ah" Um Kalthoum sings, every line she delivers, reaches something deep. In the coming show, Cassandra wants to share the feeling that is so present in Um Kalthoum's music through the embodiment of the music in dance. "She was an artist who was so intentional about the feeling behind it. Some of her songs still bring tears to my eyes." A significant portion of the show will feature her voice through recordings.

Laura Harada, a local violinist who will be playing live music for the Jawaahir show, remembered her first introduction to Um Kalthoum's singing at the Arabic Music Retreat in Massachusetts years ago. "I didn't understand the words, but it didn't matter, it was very moving. I remember her voice soaring, she had such a powerful vocal style. It was especially impactful."

Now she is thrilled to be playing music that will enhance that experience for others. "People loved her and her singing so much. She was such a strong female figure. It's encouraging to all of us as listeners and artists." In order to showcase Um Kalthoum, this year's band will reflect elements of her music. Harada will be joined by drummer Tim O'Keefe and *ny*e player Michael Ibrahim, well-known as the conductor for the National Arab Orchestra in Detroit, Michigan. Cassandra said, "We're very excited to work with Laura, Tim, and Michael. They will be working acoustically in the studio and the interpretation of the music will be incredibly beautiful."



Violinist Laura Harada



So many words have been used to describe Um Kalthoum's influence: Revered. Legendary. Formidable. Um Kalthoum was all that and more. During a time when women were held to strict gender roles, Um Kalthoum shaped her own destiny. Um Kalthoum was a bona fide diva in every sense. She had a strong personality and expected to be taken seriously. As her fame grew, she kept strict control over her performances and her image. She produced her own concerts and wrote her own contracts. She held approval over every aspect of her concerts and with whom she would appear in films. She sold 80 million records in her lifetime.

Throughout her life, Um Kalthoum was loyal to a populist Egyptian political viewpoint and despite her global influence, always referred to herself humbly as a *fallahah* or peasant. She loved her country and people from around the world loved her back.

When she died in 1975 her funeral procession in Egypt was a caravan of 4 million grieving fans. One of her many unforgettable songs asks, *remember when we lived for love?* Yes. If you love music and dance, trailblazing artists, and emotionally resonant performances: don't miss this.

Thank You

Throughout this year, Jawaahir and The Cassandra School launched an impressive amount of programming: the annual henna party, our gala *Caravan under the Stars*, Jawaahir's Annual Concert *Cassandra's Mezza*, and special courses, along with many exceptional performances, and other workshops. We'd like to thank our audience members and supporters for their generous contribution to all the dance company's activities. Our mission is ambitious, yet with the support of many people we have accomplished much of lasting value here in the Twin Cities and in communities abroad.

Be a jewel and support our work! Want to join our 2018-2019 Sponsors?

[Yes! I want to support Jawaahir and enjoy my tax-deductible contribution to the fullest extent provided by law.](#)

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Upcoming Events

[The Voice of Egyptian Dance: A Tribute to Um Kalthoum](#) Cassandra and Jawaahir invite you to join us in a concert celebration of the Egyptian vocal giant Um Kalthoum. We will perform new and revived works representing the iconic expressions of the late, great Egyptian singer. You will have the unique opportunity to hear some of these musical gems in the singer's own voice. Award-winning dance lighting designer Jeff Bartlett will set the stage for this dance/music extravaganza featuring choreography by Cassandra, *and* a new work by company member Helen Voelker. *Plus*, your ears are in for a treat as we bring you an all-acoustic instrumental ensemble! National Arab Orchestra Music Director, Michael Ibrahim, will be performing on the traditional *nay* and *oud*, along with Minnesota's incomparable world musicians Tim O'Keefe on percussion, Laura Harada on violin, and Yaron Klein on viola. *There's more!* We're pleased to share a very special surprise guest vocalist, performing her unique performance piece using the music of Um Kalthoum.

Our concert runs December 6–9 with 8pm shows on Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and 2pm matinees on Saturday and Sunday. Post-show discussion with our talented artists on Friday evening! [\\$35 reservations NOW!](#) \$5 discount for Guild members and a pay-as-able (\$5 minimum) show at Saturday's matinee on a first-come-first-served basis.

The Cassandra School Open House: Join us for FREE mini-classes, and refreshments, on Sunday, January 6, 2019 from 11am to 2pm. There will be 3 beginner classes each starting on the hour: 11am, 12pm, and 1pm! Classes open to new and current students. NEW STUDENTS — Receive \$10 off a full session when you register at the Open House! The School offers 18 classes each week, for students ranging from two left feet, to Jawaahir company members continually honing their skills. All ages, levels, shapes, and sizes welcome.

Jawaahir's 26th Annual Henna Party Help us celebrate the New Year on Sunday, January 20, 2019 from 2:30–5pm, with a delightful afternoon of henna, dance, food, and fun as we bring the Middle East to the Midwest. We provide DIY henna and you are welcome to bring a cushion to sit on to watch Jawaahir perform at 2:30pm. Don't forget to enter our two raffles: One, for a chance to have Angela of Ancient Traditions Mehndi work her magic on you and the second, for a chance to win a 10-week session of Level 1 or Level 2 classes at The Cassandra School. [Online reservations now,](#) or you may pay admission at the door. Adults are \$10 each and children 10 and younger are \$5 each. All raffles payable at the door.

For further information on any of our upcoming events, check out our [new Jawaahir website!](#) You may also call 612-872-6050, or email us at admin@jawaahir.org.