Dear Dancers,

Here goes my big mouth again. I think I should thank you all for reading anything I wrote before and for reading this too, as I have a feeling that this may be taken in more ways than I wish. But please assume that I am a nice guy underneath it all. I can be... I promise..... .

"BEEN THERE, DONE THAT, READ THE BOOK, SEEN THE FILM AND GOT THE T-SHIRT?"

I have visited almost all the continents of the world, seen all the continents during the Last few years. Almost every single state of the USA, all of the European countries, all of the South American countries, almost all of Australia and of course many of the Arabian and African countries. I was very fascinated by the interest and love for our dance, culture and music and for the sheer number of dancers that just came out to welcome me wherever I went and were very hospitable and caring and gave me no less than a couple of thousand new sisters all over the world whom I love dearly, respect deeply and dedicate my musical life to making music for them.

I also am amazed by the level of involvement of these lovely ladies and their families in the Egyptian/Middle-Eastern dance, music and culture. Some of them have fully dedicated their lives to the dance.

I hope and pray that one day the Egyptian people look at our magnificent Art Form with that much respect or that much reverence, and actually, very few of us middle easterners dedicate much time to it except in weddings, birthday parties or in some government sponsored thing like our national troupe, who have to do thing in a communistic art council style, in order to impress our heads of states and to put it out in national celebration days.

So, I feel an urge, deep from my heart to help and inform all those caring people I met on the road in my travels, workshops, and who send me videos of their dancing or in the parties that were held to celebrate my visit to their city. I feel I want to advise them correctly of my culture and of the way it is used, and an easy way to approach it.

But first of all, there is one thing I want to ASK to a large percentage of the dancers I met in my travels:

WHEN ARE YOU GOING TO START DANCING TO THE MUSIC, PLEAAASE?
Quite a few of the dancers I met are interested in "The Latest **NEW** Step from Cairo?, Or the **The Latest **New** Designed Costume, or some thing that is such an extra-extra thing to the dance.

However, I actually met a very small minority who were interested in anything that is fundamental to the dance. I have seen many dancers doing all sorts of odd things in some funny strange costumes and some in super expensive costumes that were even made by this or that famous costume maker of Cairo and some have even gone to Egypt and got them made to measure.

But I have RAARELY EVER seen any of them "DANCE TO THE MUSIC".

So of course you are going to ask me what the heck have they been doing then? I'd say, I have no idea.

In my opinion dancing is like drumming, like playing nay flute, or like playing piano, or like playing the Oud, Quanoon or any other instrument. The instrument while dancing is the body. The dancer is a musical member of the orchestra.

In any musical sphere and style, it is known that the best type of musician, is the type who LISTENS TO THE OTHERS, while he's playing his part, fitting with what they are playing. Hopefully playing the same song with them and accenting what they are doing, rising with them, and stopping when they stop.

As a Tabla player, when I play my drums to a song, I pay very close attention to every musical phrase that is being played. As a member of the group, I should definitely know what the rhythm is and I must know when the rhythm changes, slows down, speeds up, stops, accents or changes any way. I must listen to every musician playing and make sure that what I am playing compliments what he/she is playing, be it a solo or part of the orchestration. When the full orchestra is belting out a string part, I have to compliment that and rise with them, and express that part, but when the music is only played by a soloist, I play very quietly, just enough to accompany him, while still keeping the timing of the music and holding the rhythmic part, I may also very gently decorate the little accentuations that he does every now and then in order to keep the whole thing aesthetic and artistic, and keeps the communication flowing between the two of us. This same attitude applies to all instrumentalists performing on the same piece of music. Or the whole thing becomes a shamble of un-related mesh.

In my contact with many great artists of the world who's dance is relevant or related to our beloved dance, like the Indian Kathakaly dancer Nahid Siddiki of Pakistan or the Spanish Maria Belen Fernandez of Madrid, they have ALL explained to me how much
time they spent learning about rhythm, counting and singing the sounds of the rhythms and learning the meaning of the body movements and what these movement of the hand means and what that look of the eye indicates and how much they loved it and how it means something in the observer's eye and how without all of that they would have never been allowed on stage, and if by miracle they were, they won't be accepted by the audience, as the audience knows what to look for.

"Why does anyone think that in the Egyptian/Middle Eastern dance it is different?"

Yes, I know... if you show enough leg, many people will be interested in the middle east, but I am talking about ART, CULTURE and AESTHETICS HERE.

I have seen many dancers that came out with the most unsuited choreography to the music and said: And I quote "This choreography was specially designed for me by (#~@%$£ &^%@~#@^#x) {Some famous teacher's name}"

I feel from my heart about this, because I want the YOU to understand the dance and to REALLY DANCE good.

So if you want to know how to go about it and how organise your dance to the music this is the way to do it. This is a free gift to you, and I hope you make good use of it.

Here is what I think:

If you have chosen this or that piece of music.

Now, try to find out a little bit more about it. What it is saying (musically and lyrically if possible), and what is the over all gesture of the composition... is it a happy song?, is it a sad song?, is it an angry song?, is it a melancholic song?, what kind of music is it, is classical, is it folkloric, is it a Baladi song piece, is it an improvised Baladi piece, is it Saidi, and this is just in the Egyptian field …

Then find out what the rhythms are. How many bars of each rhythm it has.

Providing that you have a basic vocabulary of movement that would go with each one of those rhythms (Two or three steps that can fit each rhythm). You should do a great job. One of my favourite dancers of Egypt is Fifi Abdo. I promise you she does only three or four steps in her whole repertoire. But she does them in the right place at the right times with a lovely smile.

Then find out what the rhythms are. How many bars of each rhythm it has.

Providing that you have a basic vocabulary of movement that would go with each one of those rhythms (Two or three steps that can fit each rhythm). You should do a great job. One of my favourite dancers of Egypt is Fifi Abdo. I promise you she does only three or four steps in her whole repertoire. But she does them in the right place at the right times with a lovely smile.

Arabian music, in general is devided into simple parts:

1. The Rhythm
And let's face it, most of the Egyptian dance music is done to the Maqsoum, Masmoudi, Fallahy, Saaidi or the Karatchy. If it becomes a bit sophisticated, then they use the Samaai (10/8). (All these rhythms are available on my CD RHYTHMS OF THE NILE EUCD 1427) Where I explain the rhythms, how to play them and how they should sound like.

Also, the good thing is that: On one rhythm you can have a million songs composed, but any song can be done to one or two rhythms to make it express the right intended feel.

2. The main Melody

This is played by the full orchestra or by individual musicians.

3. The Orchestral arrangements

This is the whole band playing in unison between the main phrases. Or between the verses or choruses. This is what we call the "LAZMAH" and it can be between the phrases between the verses or choruses or just between the small solos that are the body of the main melodic statement between the verses or choruses.

ALL Arabian music is played in a "Call & Reply" Format.

This means either the soloing instrumentalist does the call and the orchestra replies or the other way around, or even two different instrumentalists would call and reply to each other.

4. The Harmony

This is the other musical part accompanying the music. Normally in thirds or fifths in tonality, running with, over, or under, or contra (against) to the main melody, but is not the main melody.

I know the exact look you are giving me right now, but, be patient my dear...my aim is to have you enjoy your dance... not to complicate things for you.

DANCING IS TO MUSIC AND RHYTHM
Now if you are dancing to a piece of music, you should at least pay a bit of attention to that music, and learn a bit about it.

I mean, I've heard it so much from dancers, worldwide, that: "The musicians don't pay any attention to me when I am dancing".

Well my dear, my answer is: They would if you were doing anything remotely connected to the music they are playing "FOR YOU". The average Arabian musician who is living in the States, Europe, or even in Egypt is a highly frustrated artist. He is desperate for joint creativity. He would love to play for a dancer who would PHYSICALLY TRANSLATE the sounds he is creating for her into movement. It is like seeing your own sound come a live in 3D. I think this is the purpose of dancing. That is to 3D-fy and make the sound visible. And vies-versa.

I know....this is making me very unpopular as I speak, but I will not go esoteric on you and promise you the dance of the seven veils or the sultan's palace dreams just to be popular, I want to see and make ABLE DANCERS, who know their business just as good as any top Flamenco or Indian dancer.

Basically as a well seasoned club and concert musician who has worked for more years than I care to admit with the greatest as well as the not so great, I had to learn the hard way, and I know what I am talking about. and hopefully I will pass on whatever useful knowledge I have over to you, so that you and all the others can benefit from it.

Now as I said earlier, the music is in sections, now...organise your dance according to these sections. There is a couple of simple rule I have for dancing :

* "DO NOT DO MORE THAN WHAT THE SOUND THAT IS COMING OUT AT YOU DICTATES. AND OF COURSE, DON'T DO LESS".
* "THE ART OF ORIENTAL DANCING IS TO VISUALLY HEAR THE MUSIC"

Now if you listen carefully, Check out the introduction, then the orchestral passages, when you have a large sound coming out of the big orchestra, say 10-20 musicians, please do not stand there on one spot in a demure position doing tiny intimate type of movement. GROW BIG, explore your stage, greet you audience, run if you have to.

Then as I am sure of Egyptian dance music, one soloist will be playing a phrase,... well according to the type of instrument that is soloing, then make your movement to suit that.

RULES FOR DANCING WITH A SOLO-ING INSTRUMENT
Nay:
Always use fluid arm movements, figures of 8's, as well as add that famous spiritual expression on your face. Keeping in mind whether or not it is played fluidly or rhythmically, or without rhythm, and the musical accents of the solo as well as any call and reply between the Nay and the orchestra.

Quanoon:
Shimmy, shimmy, shimmy, but always pay strong attention to the rhythm and the musical accents of the solo as well as the orchestral call and reply between.

Aud (Lute):
Same as the Quanoon.

Violin:
This is the one to watch out for. As the violin can play long drawn notes as well as fast choppy type tremelendo sounds. When the violin is doing "Legato" sounds, longish fluid drawn notes without stops in between, you follow what he is doing with your movement. Fig. 8's, with arms and fluidity. If he does tremelendo sounds (fast rhythmic parts), you know what to do.

Accordion:
Same as violin, but it's more earthy and Baladi.

The basic rule is simple \( E = E \)
The soloist does a sound this long \///\ you move this long \///. He makes a sound fo this long \///////, you move for this long \//////. He goes ~~~~~~~~~~, you go ~~~~~~~~~~. He does XXXXXXXXXXX You do XXXXXXXXXXX.

The same thing applies to the orchestral sound, but with large movement, and with greater use of the space. If in the middle of the soloing part you have a question and answer between soloist and orchestra, reply with the orchestra with larger movement, even a spin or changing of position, according to the sound of the orchestra, then move back to what you were doing with the soloist.

Then when the orchestra plays a big LAZMAH, then you move larger movements and you choreograph that accordingly, with special attention to stops, rhythmic changes and speed of the musical part.

All this does not infringe on artistic interpretation, or aesthetic input, however, I know that unless that it corresponds to the music in this manner, in my personal eyes it's
neither artistic nor aesthetic. This is MY PERSONAL OPINION and I know it to be the opinion of the Arabian audience.

Oh boy, I know I have opened my big mouth now, but it's because I feel you want to know, and have not been told before.

Not many people know what I have just told you, even some big and famous named dancers and choreographers and even famous teachers I don't wish to mention any names for obvious reasons.

I hope I have helped, my aim is to let you know and to help you to become a more KNOWLEDGABLE DANCER.

Please don't let my hot blooded attitude in my writing affect your views on the deeply felt message I am trying to pass on. It is my burning ambition that our beloved dance and art, to which I have dedicated my whole life, be applied in a way that will reach others and make it more loved and respected by all. Egyptian/Middle Eastern dance will only progress if we know it's science, and study it as one. Look at what they are doing with Ballet, Jazz Dance, Indian Kathakaly, Flamenco, Balinese Baris Dancing and other Indonesian dances. They are considered as a science and are studied rigorously and are highly respected worldwide.

Why is our dance considered LOW by the people who invented it? It is because they did not make it into a science otherwise they would have all been killing themselves for that CERTIFICATE that they can hang on the wall of their offices, which opens all the doors. In the Arabian world as well as many others, if you are not Doctor this or Lawyer that you are a NO-BODY. Sad But True. I grieve because of it....

Knowledge commands responsibility, and control.. and the knowledge is here for you on a silver plate

Happy dancing With lots Of Rhythm
Hossam Ramzy.