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Rachel Bennett

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Planet Egypt

Permission to publish the images from February 2011's Planet Egypt Show was obtained from the artists and the show organiser, Anne White.

Review By: Anne White
Photographer: Jane Sutherland





Helen Ainslie

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February 24, 2011

**Our star is Beatrice Curtis
Fereshteh
and introducing 'DaVid of
Scandinavia
Unaneyia from Greece
Helen
Rachel
Ziba Tabrizi
Chic Shake Shock with
Glynis, Fatema, Pauline Re-
becca. and Maggie.**

Over £166 was raised at this event to help those who suffered in Egypt. See [here](#)

Our thanks to Caroline Afifi for this.

"Fantastic February" it said on the flyer but it should have been "Fffffenomenal February" if you forgive the linguistic freedom. The majority of the performers were former Planet Egypt stars and so the stakes were high: there was no doubt in my mind -we were in for a thrilling ride. I was supremely organised this month as I wanted a front row seat.

Opening the night was Chic Shake Shock a collective of Women dancers who have been mentored and taught by Juliana Brustik of the Raqs Sharqi Society. Although members come and go, the real ethos is community dance and in many interesting places (womens' prisons, care homes, schools, colleges). It's rare that we see Com-

munity dance but this used to be a staple of the Community two decades ago, and now you are more likely to see soloist/oriental style. It's always nice to feature groups especially as show openers. They help to lift the dynamic. Founding member Dorina followed with a sha'abi solo. She is one of the Few Performing Pensioner Grandmothers that I know and receive much support from our audience. The group takes its name from the eponymous Hassan Abou El Seoud's popular piece - with a twist. I call them The South London Mafia as I only ever see them in "gangs".

Rachel followed next - she is a full-time bellydancer and bellydance teacher from Berkshire and is an original graduate of the Hossam and Serena Ramzy School of Music and Dance. She is a principal dancer with the Ramzy Dance Company and has toured with them since 2007 as a solo artist. Her most recent performance was playing the goddess Isis in the Dance Queens of the Nile show sponsored by the Petrie Museum. The Petrie Museum is based in London and has outstanding collections of objects relating to the daily life of the ordinary people of ancient Egypt. She danced twice using music from Hossam's "Ruby" album. I recall her first ever show with us many years ago, she had a lot of talent and star quality and this has blossomed further under The Ramzy School. Her confidence has grown enormously.

Persian expert Ziba Tabrizi followed and executed some Kereshmeh (clas-



Rachel Bennett

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Fereshteh

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David Badyal

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sical) dance for us and the costume represented that of a Persian miniature. She floated around the stage so gracefully. Her line and aesthetic are beautiful. Cambridge based, she performs widely in the UK and Iran, mainly in the Iranian community. Recent performances of note include the British Museum Iranian New Year weekend for Magic of Persia, the Shahnameh exhibition for the Iran Heritage Foundation, and the Cambridge Heart of the World Festival. Her second dance was a first for us - Modern Afghan dance - in a costume that only the fearless would wear. It looked like a marquis, but did not detract from her beauty. The mirror work on the costume is typical of the province of Herat. The dance shares features of Persian and Tajik dance. Afghan dance is rarely seen in the UK, and she studied it with Miriam Peretz of the Ballet Afsaneh in San Francisco. She also does Egyptian and Turkish dances too, and has a vast repertoire to draw on. She has studied Indo European languages and in the past I have discussed this fascinating subject with her. It's nice to get to know the person as well as the dancer, but the busy lives we lead don't always make this possible.

Greek Force of Nature was up next - Unaneyia (It means greek lady in Arabic). She puts her heart and soul into her shows, and has been a regular of ours for several years now. Whenever she comes we always have celebrities: Natasha Atlas, Hossam Ramzy, and this month we had Four Kings

of Dance: Khaled Mahmoud, Ozgen, Shafeek Ibrahim and Mohamed Kazafy. I suspect that a drawing factor of this may just have been David of Scandinavia... more on that later. But with the exception of Kazafy, all have attended our events regularly and are much loved by our audience! Unaneyia danced twice, and one of her tracks Si Abdo brought back the 1980s vibe to those that were around then. The singer/actress/dancer Sahar Hamdi made her name with this piece. It's quite vulgar but up-tempo and goes down a storm. Working as a belly dancer and a choreographer for the last seven years, Unaneyia has collaborated with well known artists in Greece and the UK. She fulfilled her dream of dancing with Natacha Atlas and has taught workshops in Greece and the UK and participated in festivals such as the Majma Festival in Glastonbury and the Fantasia Festival in London. She is due to teach at Belymania this May and at a big dance festival in Cairo in June.

Another Ramzy dancer - Helen took the stage. She performed twice using tracks from Hossam's Ruby album. Helen is a graduate from the Drumzy School of Music and Dance and a member of the Ramzy Dance Company. She runs her Bellydance School in Reading and Newbury in Berkshire. She also has a performance troupe called 'The Desert Diamonds', which she will bring to perform at Planet Egypt in 2012. Helen is a very competent and capable performer with very clean lines and punctuated technique,

and watching the video clip of this show it struck me how she really “went for it” and worked all corners of the room, which delighted the audience no end.

Then we had DaVid of Scandinavia who is originally from Norway, but is based in San Diego, California. He has been living there since 2005, where he runs the Ethnic Dance Academy and also administers the academy’s educational programs. DaVid tours the world as a guest artist, instructor, and choreographer. He has choreographed the opening number for the Bellydance Superstars’ newest show Bombay Bollywood. He is featured on several internationally distributed DVDs and has authored three dance educational publications. I really enjoyed his show. It seemed to me that he was a bridge between the old style of the 1970s/1980s and the Modern style. He had the strength and power of the old days in his hips which by no means were understated, and his flowing arabesques and line were clearly influenced by the Modern style. With front row seats Khaled (celebrating an early birthday) Ozgen and Kazafy were giving him their full support. The audience really liked him too and he will be back as our star in summer 2012, with workshops we hope! He was staying with me and I found him to be very well informed, very well researched and we had many long discussions. This delighted me no end and I for one feel inspired by him. He is still quite young (in his 30s) and I see a great future for him.

Fereshteh followed DaVid and she attacked the stage, phew! She was a real tour de force. She was even singing throughout one of her dances! She has been our star many times and she just gets better and better. It’s no surprise then why she has won more competitions than any one else I know. She was teaching at the Nile Group Festival and got stuck in Egypt when the recent troubles developed. She is the Winner of the Nile Group Festival April 2010, 1st place winner of Stockholm Bellydance Festival 2007, and 3rd place winner of the Stockholm Bellydance Festival 2008. You may also have heard of Fereshteh from Ramona McConney’s publication, ‘Dynamic Belly Dance’ - Fereshteh gave input to this publication and was also photographed for this lavishly illustrated book. She is the host of the one and only Bellydance Competition in Scotland, The Pyramid Awards.

During the disco part of the show we were thrilled that our Egyptian Dj Tamr (Tommy) played a special track for us. His brother who wowed us - The Prince of Egypt hip hop/bellydance fusion artist is also a singer and is releasing a CD. On his video, to accompany the CD, you will recognise the venue (Darbucka) and some well known Planet Egypt faces (Taraand Johara of London bellydance). I loved it. I am sure that you will too!

We had another belly dance competition with a 10 week Beginners’ Bellydance course as the prize, donated by esteemed benefactor Prince Rafik.





Dorina

Photographer: Jane Sutherland
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Unaneyia

Permission to publish this photo was granted by the artist.

This honourable gentleman continues the patronage of the Arts in a way that is rarely seen. I can vouch for his integrity.

We were also thrilled that Evete from NAFOURA magazine was in the house. She was the recipient of a gift and flowers from Prince Rafik. She received a lot of acclaim from our audience who acknowledge and recognize her huge contribution to our Community, as I am sure all NAFOURA readers do.

Now for a bit of drama. Readers will know that every month something happens at Planet Egypt... this month someone was on the point of being thrown out of Darbucka for identity theft.... I mentioned to the Arab owner that Kazafy was in the house and he stormed out of his office "throw him out" he cried very agitated indeed, I took a moment to grasp all this and it transpired that he thought I meant a relative of Colonel Gadaffy! Gosh so glad I got that sorted! All of us were tremendously relieved as I am sure you can imagine!

This brings me on to the subject of the political situation and the troubles in the Arab world. Tara made a lovely and moving speech addressing this, and we have just had a Benefit evening organised by The Arabian Dance Theatre. In our February show we had collected over £166 which made its way to Caroline Afifi for the victims of Tahrir Square in Cairo. I would like to thank our audience for their generosity. An update of this can be found here [http://](http://www.planetegypt.co.uk/doc/Money_%20raised_from_24February_Planet_Egypt_2011.doc)

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I would like to say that the quality and calibre of this show, and the audience's response was truly amazing. It just gets better and better – even after eight years of monthly events. I feel very honoured to be part of this experience, what an amazing atmosphere. So many guests come every month without fail, and some even plan their holidays around them so as not to miss our events. The cultural support of the Arabs means a lot to me, "bayti baytak" my home is yours. I learned my craft working in the Arab Communities and their attendance gives validity to what we are trying to create. It also gives our performers a chance to work in an environment which is not as readily accessible to them - perhaps they lack the contacts in the Arab community, perhaps they may not have "the look" to secure employment and also lots of Arab clubs have closed down. This is another reason why we are starting live music nights solely to recreate the lost magic of another era. We will be giving dancers a chance to perform to live music too, but more information to follow at a further date.

Finally, our Star Beatrice Curtis took the stage. She danced three times, twice in new costumes! I saw them being delivered! What a woman! As one would suspect of a dancer of her calibre, she chose very different themes to explore. Her first dance was "Ansak" a tribute to Oum Khalsoum, Beatrice ex-





Beatrice Curtis

Photographer: Jane Sutherland
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Chick Shake Shock

Photographer: Jane Sutherland

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plored the passion and dignity of this piece without compromise. Her second dance she introduced herself speaking about her celebrating her French connections with the song “Douce France” and finally her favourite dance style baladi. She danced to Habibi W’inaya from the latest Baladi Blues Ensemble CD from Guy Schalom, just released “Tribute to the Masters”. Beatrice is a very strong performer and she does one of the best stick dances that you will ever see, she is a real milemaa (boss woman) and plays this role with utter conviction. I was really keen to see this but it seems that I will have to invite her back to do so... Béatrice teaches regular classes in Surrey, and workshops around the country and overseas. She is a JWAAD trained/teacher, and teaches on the JWAAD Foundation and Diploma Courses

See video clip, courtesy of Nashwan Media:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4nmCH-dAJGw>



Ziba Tabrizi

Photographer: Jane Sutherland
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Planet Egypt

Team Member Spotlight

I am a proud, recent addition to the Planet Egypt team and what an amazing and fun crew they are. We work hard to provide smooth service and a happy and positive experience for all of our guests and performers. A lot of hard work and planning goes into each event to make it unique and memorable. Planet Egypt is truly exceptional in as much as it promotes national and international dance schools, teachers and students to showcase their skills in a supportive and friendly environment. Not only that, they are promoted on Planet Egypt's Facebook page!

Anne, my sister, who founded Planet Egypt, is an amazing dance teacher and performer in her own right. She invites and encourages so many performers and dance schools to promote and showcase their skills, not just in Egyptian dancing but dance disciplines from all over the Arabic and wider world. She shares her contagious love and passion for the dance and helps bring it to a wider audience.

There is an intimacy with Planet Egypt that is often lacking in other dance events. The audience are within touching distance of the performers and the audience can see the expressions on the dancers face, feel the swish of air as they undu-

late past, hear the jangle of their beads on their costumes. It feels as though you are in the middle of things, making a real connection with the show rather than just being a spectator.

The venue also explodes with energy when there is live music. Planet Egypt invites renowned musicians to play and it is an incredible experience when musicians and dancers perform together. The air crackles with energy and excitement and is breath-taking to watch.

I have always loved to dance. I was lucky enough to learn Salsa under the guidance of Homero Gonzalez and then moved to Samba with the Paraiso School of Samba, performing in the Notting Hill Carnival and other street festivals. I have to confess however, I am not keen on the limelight of centre stage and prefer the "chorus line" where my strengths lie! My next stop for me is the Charleston.

My introduction to Egyptian dancing began at the same time my Sisters Anne and Theresa began to learn the discipline. At the time I was a young teenager whose interests lay in the "madchester", indie, 70's disco and new York hip hop scene so it was in the background for many years. Somewhere and some-



Claire
Photographer: Jane Sutherland
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how I must have picked things up. I was holidaying in Turkey and being very young and enthusiastic I remember clapping and cheering a Turkish dancer who much to my horror pulled me up in front of the audience to join in. I am not quite too sure who was more surprised when I was able to copy his movements and raise the game by throwing in a few manoeuvres of my own. Another time in Marrakech, two young street performers (hustlers!) saw easy targets and approached my boyfriend and I and began singing Ya Moustafa, which I knew well again from the repertoire of music played by Anne and Theresa. Much to their astonishment I knew the song, joined in the signing and finished it off as they faltered, retreated and approached other unsuspecting but easier marks!

I love how dance and music can be a great leveller and can bring people from all walks of life and backgrounds together. There is no discrimination. Through dance and dance events, I have met people from eclectic countries such as Cuba, Brazil, Egypt, Greece, Russia, Ghana, Australia, France, America, Italy, Turkey, India and even Britain! There is no elitism, it does not matter if you are male, female, black, white, millionaire, pauper, fat, thin, tall, short, gay, straight and why should there be! My experience is that dance unites people and makes the world a friendlier place.

My role is to sit people. I share this job with the gorgeous Jenny. People can book their seats through the Planet Egypt website and we try and accommodate as many people as possible. As the venue is intimate you may find yourself sharing a table with complete strangers which can be initially disconcerting but seems to

works quite well. However, as the shows are usually packed out we cannot guarantee seating and will hold seats only until 7.30 p.m after which we will give the seats to the early-comers who are on our reservation list.

In order to guarantee yourself a place it is important to arrive early, because by the time the show starts all the seats will be gone even if you have pre-booked. Jenny and I work out the seating before the guests arrive so please ensure that we know in advance if you are bringing any extra guests so we can seat you together. It is also helpful to know if you have booked seats but cannot make it on the night so we can give the seats to others.

There is additional seating in the bar area which works on a first come first served basis and where you can still see the performers. However, some people prefer the bar! We will always do our best to seat you and give you the best view possible at the time. If you have any advice you want to share with me about this please let me know as I will always try to raise our game and give people the service they want.

On a final note I would like to say that it fills me with pride to see Anne doing so well what she loves to do. She has managed to turn a pastime into a profession and with the help of her amazing team turn every event into a memorable night. It is not just the team, musicians and dancers who enjoy themselves.

As an example to the atmosphere of the show I have this tale to tell, on my first night at Planet Egypt, I met a lovely couple who despite the odds I somehow managed to seat! They were unsure if

they wanted to see the show at first and tentatively sat down. At the end of the night I saw the husband on his feet dancing to the DJ with his palms outstretched, smiling face to the ceiling and his wife's scarf around his hips! Now that is what I call a night out! Come and join in, you have everything to gain!

Anne says:

Claire is my baby sister, and has been with us for over 7 months now helping us out predominantly with the seating at our events. Though she did come along to our first venue at Sahara Nights many years ago. She works in a pair with Jenny who we will feature later. Few people twigged the family connection however, as in comparison with my twin and I she is positively subdued.....in fact the Team doubted her heritage somewhat!!

The seating role has been created out of the need to start our show on time and for me to be freed up to deal with other issues. Gradually she is getting to know our regulars and she performs her role very well indeed. It's a very pressurized role as the influx of people demands immediate attention and for half an hour more it can be a very focussed and concentrated task. She showed her enthusiasm at the start of her role with us by chatting animatedly with our clientele and getting to know them. Now the niceties are more limited however, but she always goes the extra mile.

I am really pleased that she has come on board and that she has taken such a shine to our events and to the rest of the Team. She performs her role so well that I never get involved and not only that she is able to be charm personified. It's a

real pleasure to work alongside her. I am trying to "encourage" her to learn more about Egyptian dance though, however she is most resolute, and at heart a "samba" girl! It's either that or Theresa and I overdid it when she was so young....

My final comment is that the Seating roles have been created for a number of reasons, not least because I have not got round to putting paypal on our site yet for advanced booking. (so many things to do....) So the seating issue as we have burgeoning demand has been a real trial of endurance for all involved. Happily the upside of this is that we have a relationship with all our guests and the customer care part of our night works really well -I am sure you will tell me if you think otherwise though and we welcome all feedback that will help us make a great night out an exceptional one!