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Making things work for all of us **Making things work for all of us**

Strive for the highest standards that you can. Keep your cool and your integrity. Be scrupulous and generous, allow people to make mistakes and with luck they will learn from them. Be kind but be truthful. Remember the Culture that this dance comes from.

Nod to our forebearers

Dear Readers

I write this month, not to tell you about our last event as we did not have one in December, but to give you an insight into Planet Egypt and how you can get on to our waiting lists if you are a Professional..... I thank Evete for this as it was her suggestion

How we started

Yvette Cowles, Vashti and I were all good friends who had collaborated many times. I felt that there was a demand in the market place for regular events and get together. I approached them, came up with a name and then we were off on an exciting journey.....

We started off in 2003 doing weekly events, but soon realized that a monthly formula would work better..... Our initial aim was to create a meeting place for lovers of this dance, somewhere to network and have fun, and use the space for my performance class to hone their skills. However the demand at professional level meant that our direction changed. We made lots of mistakes in those days, despite my 15 years of events experience beforehand and luckily this was before websites/facebook and the internet. So unless you have a long memory or were there our mistakes have been private !!!!

After hosting events for 3 years for free we realized that in order to continue we would need to adapt to the market place and charge entry. We started off with 3 people at our shows and ended up with about 300 every month. It was quite intimidating and a careful risk assessment meant we also had to adopt a new policy. Of course as soon as we started to charge our numbers halved (funny that!). Yvette dropped off the radar almost as soon as we got started, but we remain good friends, and Vashti and I continued our new journey at Darbucka. Vashti has since taken a back seat but we remain good friends and she is a great source of inspiration and support.

We have been at Darbucka for 5 years and attract about 150-200 people at our shows every month. As our reputation became more established demand to perform

increased to the extent that we had very long waiting lists. Also I wanted to book 2 years ahead of myself for peace of mind so that I could get on with the nitty gritty of day to day admin.

The success has meant that I receive 100 emails a day about my events or queries from all over the world, as I am perceived as an Agony Aunt. I was even asked for my recommendations from people who are based in Egypt for dancers for their weddings. Extraordinary! At any time I have 6000 emails in my inbox and the more I answer the more replies I get. Of course it's hard to forward book the future when I am shackled to the present.

I have had to be very proactive to come up with a solution to address all this as follows;

Future Developments

I am creating 3 new websites

Planet Egypt

Will only have details relevant to our events and those that we feature

Awalim

A directory and resource centre for all teachers and students. I am extrapolating material from Planet Egypt's current website for this reason. It should mean with improved navigation that no-one ever need email me again as material they need will be at their finger tips

Anne White Dance

My classes website. I have long wanted to separate my classes as Planet Egypt is not about me it's about those whom I serve ie the Community

Behind the scenes I have been busy and by the end of 2011 all the websites should be fully functioning

Being charitable I assume that many of those who email me can't find what they want on my website as the navigation is very poor. However with the new websites everything will change.....

Criticisms

Other than poor navigation I know people complain about the performance waiting lists. It's true, that's why I perform once every year or two at the most. But if I created shows that were longer- to accommodate the demand people would leave my events after all the trains had stopped running, so that won't work. We are a victim of our own success in this regard. But having said that there are plenty of opportunities around to perform elsewhere but we are seen as the Holy Grail and dancers want it on their CVs.

Pro active

Every time a dancer emails me to perform I file their request for consideration. If I know them its quite straight forward, if I don't they audition or I see a clip. This helps

me to judge how they will fit into my events. Of course with 25 years of experience in this field I am drawing on vast experience.

Once or twice they clearly have not been ready and I recommend they attend my events to judge the calibre and quality and with some self reflection (ideally!) they see that they need more training. Only once have I had to turn someone down and although I felt very unkind in doing so it was done with sensitivity and the dancer actually agreed with me. Anyhow before I get deluged with requests from all and sundry I am very capable of wielding my sword, there are procedures to follow
Audition or send a video clip

Then I let you know if you are accepted or not

It puzzles me to receive requests from London based dancers who want to dance for me but have never bothered (in 8 years!) to check us out. That does not sit well with me. I question their motives. It is not stamp collecting. We are trying to build a community and I am far more likely to book those that attend our events and “get” what we are doing and contribute their own energy to it.

2011

I booked all dancers for 2011 in 3 days. I used the long waiting lists and am pleased that we have many new dancers who will grace our stage, many of whom have waited for over 2 years. Each show for 2011 has new dancers. In total 37 new acts, all others being ones we are familiar with. Getting the balance is important we can't have too many new acts in the same show as it's asking a lot of them to carry it for the first time.

Regarding our stars this year

5 of our Stars have had the privilege of being stars previously

Galit (who we have not featured for over 5 years) Southern based

Tracey Gibbs (who we last featured 3 years ago) Manchester based

Fereshteh (who we featured in May 2010 and August 2008) based in Scotland

Siouxie Cooper who we featured in February 2010) from Devon but now based in Manchester

Beatrice Curtis (who we last featured in August 2009 and who was last our Star in January 2008) Based in Surrey

All of these ladies reflecting many different dance disciplines and training pedigrees from Suraya Hilal, Josephine Wise, Sara Farouk, Wendy Buonoventura, Raqs Sharqi Society, Randa Kemal, and Dina for starters. All of whom have carved their name into the UK dance scene in some way, and many of whom run regular events or participate in them.

Galit produces one woman shows “Bellylicious” and uses comedy well which is unusual to see in the UK. She produces dvds and is an engaging and accomplished performer

Tracey has many strings to her bow, she helps to organize Raqs Britannia, has a dance agency (Taste of Cairo), is a well known and respected photographer, and promotes and manages an Egyptian based charity **Just Because**. She is an innovative performer and takes risks. I have seen her evolve considerably in the 14 years or so that I have known her

Fereshteh has won more competitions than any one else that I am aware of. She pushes herself hard is ambitious and achieves her objectives relentlessly striving for perfection.

Siouxie also trained in West African dance and has tremendous stage presence. She aims to complete her PhD in belly dance this year and has a lot to offer our community.

Beatrice is the indomitable Queen of Raqs Sassy. An uncompromising performer she demands your attention (and gets it!)

5 new stars

Gwen Booth, who we have featured a number of times, a delicious and versatile performer, and a Prop Master, Oxford based

Ljiljana, who we have previously featured, albeit some years ago, will work with a Gypsy violinist **Gundula**, offering no doubt some eastern european flavours.

Mesmerising and gifted dancer with true surrender. London based

Newcomers

Ranya from New York City, has consummate knowledge of theatrical performance skills and an international profile who also produces cds and dvds

Outi from Cairo, who makes a living performing there and who also produces cds and dvds

And finally **Rakiya from Belgium** who has waited patiently on our list for a long time and has Berber lineage. She formed a humanitarian association promoting the schooling of girls in South Morocco. From her clips I know that our audience will love her

Our International profile is increasing all the time with dancers in 2011 coming from the States, Greece, Egypt, Germany, South Africa and Belgium.

This year too we have a lot more tribal than at any other time in our 8 year history, reflecting it's growing popularity. And this year 4 male dancers are on the bill!

We rarely have students/fledglings but this year have 3 student groups performing with their teacher/under her auspices. Perhaps next year we could have more?

As usual a wide variety of disciplines will be our trademark signature

2012

For 2012 I envisage a similar trend of those we already know and love, and newcomers, at least half of our stars will be so for their first time, and I anticipate even more international artists. I intend to start looking at and booking 2012 by early to mid Summer. So if you want to be considered do get in touch

Publicity

I would like to thank Nafoura for the privilege of having a column that I really enjoy writing. Our profile has increased considerably as a result, along with the continued support of the Community. Web statistics average about 17,000 visits per month so far in January 2011.

In the past year our stats demonstrate:

103,689 Pages Viewed

40,988 Visits (unique)

with most of the traffic ranking 1 to 10 in volume from The States and Europe then ranking 10-20 from mostly Europe but featuring Kuwait and Senegal .

Further down the list are many other Arab nations and the Far East

I am learning how best to assimilate and process the information as all this is fairly new to me. But it proves that the Whole World loves belly dance doesn't it!!!

Other events

We have been a template to inspire others to create monthly/regular shows. Nafoura Readers will no doubt be inspired and informed by the panoply of shows in London, and I wrote a column for The Gilded Serpent "Visitors Guide to London" mentioning the ones that I personally recommended. [See here](#) and [here](#)

<http://www.gildedserpent.com/aboutuspages/AnneWhite.html>

<http://www.gildedserpent.com/cms/2010/09/10/anne-white-london-scene/>

Note to evete I am not sure if u can use all this perhaps just linking to it may be better???

Outside of London the market place is heaving with monthly events many of which have been inspired by us and we are credited as such (always appreciated... we were the first regular monthly event after all !)

In **Essex** Sitara and the Eastern Roses <http://www.sitaradance.co.uk/Events.htm>

In **Nottingham** Malika and Sahara Nights

http://www.bellydanceworld.co.uk/sahara_nights.htm

In **Yorkshire** Banat Eshorouk <http://www.banateshorouk.co.uk/>

And elsewhere lots more are springing up. Perhaps Nafoura could take a tour around the UK with established regular showcase nights?

It's a marvellous way to meet friends, have fun, raise awareness and standards and build a vibrant and integrated community,

Supporting the community

I would encourage those who are established and respected in their fields to consider setting up a regular event. Start off small, involve those in your community nearby, be inclusive, build up your experience and profile. Feature dancers whether students or professionals who are good at what they do and will inspire others. Do not compromise your standards or integrity though. And do all this with love initially, it will get you further that pound coins believe me. Perhaps I could write an article about this separately though as this months column will never end !

Achievements and Collaborations. You never know what is ahead for you ...

As part of our work at Planet Egypt I have received great recognition from the Arab community. Many Arabs attend our events and I enjoy this cultural support, its great to see them sing along to the music too. There are projects in the pipe line I can't elaborate on but.....in the past

I had the great pleasure to introduce Hakim to London courtesy of Organic Music.

And I got to dance with him too (he is better than me LOL!)

We hosted auditions for Oojami that wanted to find more dancers (we are repeating this exercise in 2011 but with Arab bands)

And we now have our own dedicated anthem courtesy of Hossam Ramzy and Phil Thornton's new cd **Egypt Unveiled** . Woweeeeeeeeee

Acknowledgement

Without the love faith and support of my Team (and we are all equals within it) I would not have had the journey that I have so far enjoyed.

Without the willingness and generosity of those who supported us freely for the first 3 years when we did our events for free I would not have the experience, fun or success that Planet Egypt enjoys.

Without my inspirational first Teacher Suraya Hilal I would never have taken my first steps

Without those who formed the Community before/as I arrived on it I would never even have thought of Planet Egypt. My thanks to MEDA (formerly Middle Eastern Dance Association) who pioneered events in London like the Rheingold Club and the Covent Garden Belly dance days

My thanks to them all for the sweetness and joy that all this brings me and for the many true and deep friendships that have been forged. I feel truly blessed

Long live Nafoura!