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Notes from Cassandra

Just before the Weeklong Intensive, we were appalled to discover we had to RESCHEDULE our fall concert! Happily it has been done; our new dates are October 22–25, 2015, at The Lab Theater. I invite you all to come to our latest creation, “Sing To Me A Little” with our special guests, Michael Ibrahim and Ghada Derbas of the National Arab Orchestra, fresh from an appearance on “A Prairie Home Companion.”

With a visit from Indigoose Silk Veils just around the corner, and a Cabaret upcoming, and my work with the Circus Juventas dancers, I’m trying to squeeze in a little time for new choreography. I’m very excited to be using some music and rhythms I love, and, in my opinion, very much underplayed. The Jawaahir dancers are ROCKING the new works! Their skill, dedication, and feeling inspire me every day! Hope you can join us in our exciting new location.



photo by Jan Geisen

Michael Ibrahim and Ghada Derbas in Jawaahir’s Annual Show

Sing To Me A Little

October 22–25 at The Lab Theater in Minneapolis



photo by Jan Geisen

Michael Ibrahim, an Arabic musician and founder of the National Arab Orchestra (NAO), and his wife, Ghada Derbas, singer with the NAO, are performing in *Sing to Me a Little*. Michael is a multi-instrumentalist and Ghada is singing.

It is not their first trip to Minnesota, but it is their first appearance for Jawaahir’s annual dance concert. The NAO has performed all over the U.S. and was recently featured with Ghada singing on Minnesota’s *Prairie Home Companion* show.

It’s been a whirlwind year for the Ibrahim-Derbas household, but according to Michael they are always pushing the envelope, working hard to promote and sustain the traditions of Arab music. Both of them have roots in the U.S. and abroad, and one of their goals is to use music as a bridge to unite many cultures under the banner of Arab music.

Michael was born in Sterling Heights, Michigan to Syrian parents. Michael credits his grandfather, a Greek Orthodox priest, for instilling in him a love of music. “I remember my grandfather’s chanting in church. It was simple what he did, but that did it for me. I have been getting to know music over the course of my life,” he said. He earned a degree in music from Eastern Michigan University and another in conducting from Wayne State University.



Michael is mentor to both music professionals and young students. In addition to working with so many musicians, he also mentors kids in schools and helps them increase their musical literacy. Michael and Ghada have a 10-month-old son, Issa, and they recently moved their household to Dearborn, Michigan to be closer to the NAO’s rehearsal space. He is full-throttle and undeterred in pulling all of his interests—playing music, conducting, teaching—together. To say he’s busy is an understatement.

Michael has a reputation as an innovator on the Arab music scene, and he decided to start the NAO after one of his teachers wasn’t able to. “Founding the NAO is carrying on his dream,” Michael said of pursuing the idea. But Michael has certainly put his own signature on the orchestra as its director and conductor. The orchestra averages anywhere from 30 to 100 musicians at a time, depending on the performance. The NAO is broken down into two groups, a smaller chamber ensemble and a full orchestra with a choir.

When Ghada was eight years old, she sang “Inta Oumry” by Oum Kalthoum on Lebanese television. Thus her talent was discovered early, and she has gone on to win a number of singing contests including one in Alexandria, Egypt, as well as singing and performing at festivals and music programs around the world. She entered the Institute of Music in Beirut at the age of ten to study vocal technique, music theory, and Arab-Andalus music. Ghada is known for inspiring strong feeling in her audiences because of her compelling enthusiasm and exceptional singing.

Michael and Ghada are looking forward to their upcoming trip to perform with Jawaahir in Minneapolis. “Dance in the Arab world is a 3-D representation of the music. A good dancer understands that and is translating what she hears. It’s a collaboration between the dancer and musician,” Michael said. “We’ve also heard good things about working with Cassandra,” he said. They plan to bring their son with them on their travels, so it will be a family trip, too. “We’re excited. It’s good to meet good people and work with them. It will be fun,” he said.

Upcoming Events

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

[Buy your tickets now](#) for **Cassandra's Cabaret: HOT Summer Night!** starring Cassandra, Aliyah Sahar, Angelina, Monique, and featuring the rock-group Astarte including Cassandra on Saturday, August 29.

[Register now](#) for **Music Raqs and Dabke workshops with Karim Nagi**. Then join him and the band Amwaaj for a **Hafla** Saturday night! October 3–4.

Mark your calendar now to come to **Jawaahir's annual show, Sing To Me a Little** with the incomparable sounds of the Georges Lammam Ensemble, and featuring special guest performers Michael Ibrahim and Ghada Derbas of the National Arab Orchestra, Detroit. Thursday–Sunday, October 22–25 at [The Lab Theater](#), 700 First Street North, Minneapolis.

[Oasis Dance Camp](#) is the longest running residential Oriental dance retreat in North America. Beginning in 1985 Oasis is dedicated to educating dancers in the art of Oriental Dance and its related folkloric forms. Join Cassandra and Sahra Saeeda at [Oasis North: Traverse City, Michigan](#), September 16–20, 2015. Then, join Cassandra and Uza of New York at [Oasis South: St Augustine, Florida](#), November 4–8, 2015.

[Oasis Dance Camp](#) and Cassandra are going to **Istanbul and Fez** April 2016! The focus of the trip is on music, and there are intensive Oriental technique classes with Cassandra as well as classes with local teachers in both cities, evenings of live music and entertainment, and days of exploring these exotic locales. To be added to the list of interested travelers, send an email to: saida@oasisdancecamp.com.



photo by Andrew Swaine of Boston