

Middle-Eastern Images in Far-away Finland

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Notes made by the Israeli composer Dr. Tsippi Fleischer

It's not every day that we are able to see the reflection of ourselves as the Western world sees us - as tone-setters of the special, sun-saturated Middle-Eastern culture...Or more simply, to see ourselves from a great physical distance and from a completely different ambience. When looking back on thousands of years in time, one cannot but be aware of the enormous power inherent in the cultural images created here in bygone days; they are with us even now but have been distanced from our perception. The stress of the times deals pitilessly with impressions even though they have been firmly entrenched.

What are these images then, for example?

Women's dance-movements in the Near East may be said to reflect these images extremely well: the closeness to Nature (to the lightly-wafting breezes, the flowing waves of the sea), the yearning for freedom of expression counterbalanced by an obsession with the need for modesty; snake-like undulations fluctuating dramatically between abasement and servile devotion on the one hand, and the conflict with sensuous sexuality on the other; sensitive self-expression as opposed to mysterious "generalized" connotations of murder, inspiration, entertainment, ecstasy, ritual, and the concept of beauty as such, concealed in every dance figure - these feminine movements, both large and small, have been with us since the Canaanite figures of Deborah,

Miriam and Yiftah's daughter who contain within themselves much heroism, as opposed to the magic of Samiah Gamal in the presence of Farid El-Atrash in Egypt of the 30s and 40s.

Is the perpetual desire of the movie star Elizabeth Taylor to resemble an exotic Oriental beauty, an indication that all the western world is enslaved by the bonds of Eastern magic?...How has the West perceived Eastern elements? Which of these have been internalized, and how? What of concealed eroticism side by side with the temptation of self-exposure? * And what of that great experience - the birth of human beings, here, in this everyday world, as opposed to all these?

"The Middle East as a Cultural Source": this was the title of the congress in which I participated while visiting Finland; the Dance Festival was held simultaneously and lasted the duration of the congress. I felt a strange kind of excitement from the very fact of being a "flesh and blood" representative from the Near East, even more so since I was invited to the Festival as a woman composer, a creative artist from the area; this time a serious emphasis was placed on the position of women, from a scientific and theological aspect as well. My involvement with the cultures and religions of the area amazed the audience. The world at large does not envisage Israelis today in this way...

The visual-movemental aspect of the musical works (which

* Omar Khayam tries, for example, to distance himself consciously from the disorientation caused by sexuality.

I chose to present to the audience)* woven into the historical-cultural aspect, merged with the dance events presented; thus my images, the spectacular staging of Mabul (Deluge) danced by the Israeli group Bat-Sheva, and Pearls performed by the Egyptian dancer Suraya Hilal, blended well with the heritage of the far North. Ohad Neharin's stylistic fusion was one of the highlights of the festival; this can be stated completely objectively, even though we both had the same surge of "local patriotism" in faraway Finland.

Music and dance appeared again and again as complementary forces. The traditional festive frameworks separating men and women at a wedding, for example, have abounded in movement and dance from earliest times. From here a direct line leads to the relationships between men and women in the three religions which flourished in our region, dealt with in all gravity by the congress. Theology, it appears, no less than miracle-working art, may well form a bridge between the nations of the region.

We are approaching important crossroads; they are illuminated by lights of old, and as I said before - the stress of the times suppresses these lights, or may even cause them to fade away completely into total darkness.

* In addition to my oratorio on the expulsion from Spain (in which the symbiosis between all three religions is reflected), I presented my magnetic tapes with the voices of Beduin and Armenian children, and Lia Schubert's television ballet to my symphonic poem A Girl named Limonad which I composed eighteen years ago, inspired by a Lebanese poet's words.