

Iskandar Dance Company



“ El Saqiyeh “

“ Awakening ”

“ Becoming ”

The Company:

Iskandar Dance Company is distinguished for its strong and singular aesthetic line and purity of movement drawn from a musical, emotional and human expression. The choreographies delve into the different stages of consciousness expressing points of transition between theatre and movement without superfluous elements.

Through the idiom of *Hilal Dance*, the Company works with music and live rhythm that are intrinsically connected to the musicality of the body portraying the dance at its core; a cultural tradition reinterpreted as an integrated contemporary expression.

Alessandro Bascioni, international dancer and choreographer is based in London and Florence. In 2005, he launched the *Iskandar Dance Company*, with the premier of the special piece ***El Saqiyeh*** (The Waterwheel) in the *Tanzhaus nrw* Düsseldorf in March 2006. Since then, the Company has gone on to tour *El Saqiyeh* and the other productions of ***Memory***, ***Awakening*** and ***Becoming***.

Some of this work with the support of the Scottish Art Council has been showcased successfully throughout Europe to great critical acclaim in many well known theatres including, *Sadler's Wells*, London; the *Edinburgh Festival*, Tobacco Factory, Bristol; The Drum, Birmingham; *Tanzhaus nrw*, Dusseldorf; *Rotebuhl Theatre*, Stuttgart; *IMA* (Institute du Monde Arabe), Paris; *Teatro delle Erbe*, Milano; as well as other many majors cities and venues.

Press Quotes:

"Iskandar Dance Company...There is a meditative subtlety in what the choreographer Alessandro Bascioni and his fellow dancers achieve: - "El Saqiyeh, is like an oasis of restorative calm. " The Herald - M. Brennon

"It was the sense of freedom which ran through Iskandar Dance Company's beautiful El Saqiyeh, which translates as "the Waterwheel"(...) Three dancer, breezes onto the stage, dancing in unison, encircling one another, weaving in and out. The quality of the dancing is like no other - giving a wonderful sense of harmony between costume, dance and music." Ballet Magazine - Ian Palmer

"Alessandro Bascioni the enigmatic lead dancer shows through his choreography an appreciation of the dimension of his stage and produces dances which although they repeat are rarely repetitive. A well hour spent at Sadler's Wells".

Dancing Time Magazine, Gerald Dawler

"Mesmerising" British Theatre -Peter Lahan Edinburgh Festival

"Wearing long sweeping dresses they whirl and twirl in a delicious display to North African Rhythm" The Scotsman, Kelly Apter

"Iskandar Dance Company's El Saqiyeh is slow and flowing. The dancers have a soft, bouncy weight as they take small galloping steps, their jiggling shoulders and upheld arms light and calm as their silken skirts whirl around their ankles".

The Stage Edinburgh, Katie Philips

"Un langage tournoyant, taillé avec grace dans l'espace, qui témoigne la vitalité de la dance pure." La Tribune de Bruxelles

"An extraordinary spiritual dance piece..." The Evening Standard

[Awakening] *"...The unique qualities of this dance is impressive...they perform as one living breathing unit." The Metro, K.Watson 2009*

The production:

A' Nour



Photos © Susie Carlino

In this production Alessandro is joined by four dancers, Alaitz Arregi, Francesca di Ieso, Giorgia Mariani, Mirella Maciariello and accompanied by three percussionists Ibrahim el Minyaw, Ali el Minyaw, Paolo Veronica and the (recorded Zar) music of Ibrahim Oubaid.

“Duration of the performance 45 minutes long.”

A' Nour, the Arab word for “Light” epitomizes the cycle of opposing forces; the forces of *shadow and light*. Alessandro’s choreographic journey is inspired by the power of the Moulid, the Egyptian folk festivals where people on mass gather to celebrate the birth of the Prophet or Saints. Sha’abi people perform rituals and dances for many days and nights with the Sufi Thikr or devotional dance, the invocational Hadrah and finally by the animistic Zar or trance rituals originally rooted in Africa. A’Nour is an intimate experience which tells, thinks and dances between the boundaries of the individual and the Divine; a search through the darkness into the light.

Highlights of the **A’Nour** programme:



The opening piece, with soft melodies and bittersweet sounds of the arghul and the safara flute, reminiscent of the Sufi mystical tradition, reveals the dancers moving through the light and dark, playing through an unconscious game of reaching and yearning. The pure dance movements reveal a subtle balance of control and surrender that gracefully traverses the space in a flourish of spiral configurations.

The final piece, called *Shadow of Light*, moves into the world of the animistic ritual, based on the concept that one's body and mind are compelled to release dark forces (or evil spirits) through high pitched movement and dramatic release that culminates in rebirth, spiritual elevation and connection with the Divine.

The four dancers walk intently into a darkened and evocative atmosphere of piercing soulful chants, clouds of incense and the roaring of the drums. The piece with the sounds of prayers unfolds into a series of hypnotic repetitions, swaying steps throbbing with the rhythm. The three line up of drummers and the dancers unite engulfing the space with heightened energy, a play of frenzied movement, bold and yet centred, underlying the raw core of the dance. The dramatic release reminds us that beyond the chaos of darkness there is a place of light, calm centred oneness.....

Dancers Biography:

Alaitz Arregi Sudupe was born and raised in a professional artistic family of traditional musicians from the Basque country. She studied History of Art and went on searching for a new avenue for her own creative expression by studying different dance forms, among them Flamenco and Indian dance. Thereafter, she moved to London to study Hilal Dance in 2001 and began training with Alessandro Bascioni. After three years, she joined the Iskandar Dance Company and went on tour with the productions of *El Saqiyeh* and the *Awakening*. Alaitz has been a pivotal figure in Alessandro's creations and brings a rare talent and dedication to the work. Alaitz has been training in the Professional course with Suraya Hilal from 2004.

Francesca Di Ieso, born in Salerno, Francesca, early in life, developed a passion for and later an expertise in the oral tradition of the culture and music/dance of Southern Italy. She became an authority in the field of southern Italian dance where she taught and performed and still is with her group *Canto Antico* over a period of fifteen years. In 1999, she discovered Hilal Dance and was fascinated by the similarity of the two dance traditions, leading her to training with Sabina Todaro, Senior Hilal Dance teacher, for four years. She was then invited in the professional course with Suraya Hilal in 2003. She joined Iskandar Dance Company in 2007 and went on to tour with the production of *Awakening* and *Becoming*. Francesca has a strong ability and talent for quick development in the dance and a strong presence.

Mirella Maciariello, born in Capua, Italy, studied dramatics and received her diploma from the *Accademia dei Filodrammatici* of Milan in 1987. She went on to further her studies at the School of Dramatic Arts in Moscow directed by *Anatolij Vassil'iv*. She then appeared in many theatre productions including, *Uomo e gentiluomo* of E. De Filippo Direction by Ugo Gregoretti
Quartett of Heiner Muller Direction by Emil Hrvatin
Ciascuno a suo modo of L.Pirandello Direction Anatolij Vassil'ev.
In 2000, she began to study and train in Hilal Dance in Milan with Senior Hilal Dance teacher Sabina Todaro, and until now she continues her training also in the Hilal School with S. Hilal and A. Bascioni. In 2009, she joined and the Iskandar Company.

Giorgia Mariani, was born in Milan, and graduated in Figurative Art. She later studied Dance and Theatre and 1999 she moved to Seville in order to deepen the study of Flamenco. She also, studied Middle Eastern dance since the age of twelve and began her training in Hilal Dance in 2008, joining the Professional Course in 2010. Giorgia currently lives in Cádiz southern Spain where she runs the successful centre "Circulo de Expresión Creativa" where she teaches Hilal Dance and Creative Dance. Giorgia has joined the Iskandar Dance Company in 2010.

Percussionist Biography:

Ibrahim el Minyaw, Egyptian born comes from the original school of tabla players who worked with many popular artists in Egypt. He first started to work with Suraya Hilal at her major programmes in London (Queen Elisabeth Hall, Sadler's Wells, The Place & others) in the late 90's and has continued working in her company ever since. Ibrahim's diverse knowledge of rhythms and refined "touch" on the tabla has earned him his popularity with the public. The collaboration with Suraya Hilal has led to progression and innovation in his playing and in the rhythm for Hilal Dance. Through his work in the Hilal Dance School and since the creation of Aseel (2004) Ibrahim works with the Alessandro Iskandar Company.

Wassim Halal, was born in the Lebanon and studied the Darbuka at a young age. After many years of work in the popular Middle Eastern music. Wassim, developed an interest in the Iranian and Indian influences on Arabic music and also in rhythmic prose. He also had an interest in Jazz and contemporary music improvisation. Wassim became associated with various artists from different disciplines working on the thematic similarities, traces, and differences, which opened possibilities in his technique and in playing the Zarb, tabla and the Afghani Zerbaghali. These influences have enriched his pedagogic language and on many occasions he has been invited to give workshops in various locations such as Paris, Lyon, Toulouse, Brussels, and Barcelona. Wassim, also, regularly works on stage in different projects in Egyptian music, Balkan music, Jazz, and with dance, and has accompanied Suraya Hilal and Alessandro Bascioni's workshops in Paris.

Paolo Veronica, Italian born, began to study Arab percussion, in particular, the Darbuka in 2004. A year later, he met his teacher Ibrahim el Minyaw through courses of Egyptian rhythm and dance and up till now he continues to work with him and to study the technical skills of Egyptian traditional rhythm. Paolo opened his cultural centre called Khatawat in 2007 where he also teaches percussion on the tabla and accompanies dance classes. Through his centre, Paolo regularly invites international percussionists and dancers and continues to follow seminars in Arabic percussion on tabla, riq, frame drums and tapan. From 2008 up till now, he continues to train and play accompanying workshops of Egyptian dance in Italy and abroad. Paolo played the sheet music of Skutari Orchestra, traditional Albanese music and with the quartet Darab (music of the Middle East and Maghreb) with the aim to help expand his knowledge of the Arab culture.

Hilal Dance®

Hilal Dance®, a contemporary form, encompasses holistic breath-based body training and a system of movement concepts that allow full exploration of a wide range of expression through the music and rhythm. Hilal Dance is grounded, energetic and expansive. Working from a centred body, it expresses both fluidity and strong rhythm. The movements and training are lead by powerful concepts that embody Eastern wisdom and knowledge similar to that of the Indian and Chinese cultures. The dance itself is specifically related to the aesthetic that underlies Arab/Egyptian art. This is reflected in the dramatic use of repetition and improvisation, the clear geometry of line, the importance of intricate movements that can expand outward into space, the emphasis on line both rhythmic and lyrical, and intricate details that create the whole in a language that is both abstract and emotional. **The outstanding achievement of Hilal Dance is that it brings into view for the first time in the contemporary world a cultural based, progressive and universal form.**

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