

Belly dancer to bring shimmering color to university's international-arts festival



Egyptian belly dancer Soraya El Khouby will perform the ancient art of belly dancing at the International Cultural Arts Festival April 10 at Monmouth University in West Long Branch.

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Evoking a rich culture

BY VINCE MILLER

Staff Writer

When Soraya El Khouby performs her Egyptian belly dance at the International Cultural Arts Festival April 10 at Monmouth University, she not only will entertain her audience but also will try to show off the cultural richness of her art.



The sinuous dance movements already were in her blood when she started performing in children's artistic showcases at age 4, she said.

"My mother made me my first costume," Soraya El Khouby said.

Since then, El Khouby said she has performed in the United States, the Orient, the Middle East, Europe and the Mediterranean.

The belly dance goes back thousands of years, she said.

"The dance is a celebratory fertility per-

formance where all emotions come into play," she said. "In planning my dance, I study the ethnic mix of my audience and base my choreography on that."

Unlike western dance, there is no formal training for belly dancing, El Khouby said.

"It's a dance that's passed on from generation to generation," she said. "It's not as scientific as some western dances. Form and posture play a role in the movements being done correctly.

"There is a quarter step, rather than a half-step, in the belly dance that separates it from western style of dance."

Among the highlights of her career is a performance for the late majesty King Hassan II and the royal family at their palace in Casablanca, Morocco, she said. She also has toured India, performing in upscale hotels with her show, "Soraya's Night at the Casbah."

In the United States, she has performed at Atlantic City casinos, Egyptian weddings, hotel banquets and corporate theme parties such as Arabian Nights.

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In her performances, Egyptian belly dancer Soraya El Khouby dons elaborately beaded costumes made up of a beaded top, a belt worn low on the hips, a chiffon skirt, a tiaralike beaded crown and anklet.

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"Unfortunately, there are still many misconceptions not only about the true art of belly dancing but also about the ancient and beautiful, historic traditions of Egypt and the Middle East," El Khouby said. "On April 10, I hope to close that gap."

One such misconception about the dance materialized early in El Khouby's career when her agent booked her for a bachelor party.

"I never want to do an event where my art is completely sexualized," she said. "I had just started to dance, when I realized that the all-male audience expected something completely different. So I walked out."

"The dance is sensual but never sexual."



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El Khouby formed her own ethnic-arts booking and talent agency called Soraya's Mid-East Dance and Music Productions in the early 1990s. She offers authentic, Egyptian-style belly-dancing videos through her Web site at www.bellydanceby-soraya.com, with anthropological writings about the history of belly dancing in Egypt and the Middle East, as well as monthly clips from her live shows and concerts.

El Khouby has a bachelor of arts degree in cultural anthropology and sociology with an emphasis on Middle Eastern and Mediterranean studies.

For her performances, El Khouby dons elaborately beaded costumes made up of a beaded top, a belt worn low on the hips, a chiffon skirt, a tiaralike beaded crown and an anklet.

Many men also perform belly dancing in Egypt, El Khouby said.

"They wear a traditional white robe, something tight on the hips and dance with a stick. It's a folk dance," she said.

To accompany her dance, El Khouby often brings in an orchestra of Egyptian and Lebanese musicians playing five to 12 instruments. She calls upon them for Arabian Nights parties and performances before royalty.

For her performance at the university, she said she will use her own compact disc, which will encompass all Middle Eastern styles.

"My performance will be authentic and completely professional to meet Monmouth University's expectations."

El Khouby's husband, Dr. [redacted]

is a physician.

The couple lives in Margate, Atlantic County.

She expects to perform from 9:30 to 10 p.m. in Woodrow Wilson Hall on the Monmouth University campus in West Long Branch. The show, which includes international food and raffles, starts at 8 p.m. Tickets are \$5.