

# The Artistic Impact of the Reda Troupe

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Article #2 of 8

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The following is a summary of dance in theaters in Egypt prior to the first performance of the Reda Troupe on the 6th of August 1959. To know what kind of dance in theaters took place in Egypt at that period, will help readers to comprehend the impact the first theater dance group had on the Egyptian public. This article is intended primarily as a point of reference and a departure from which to demonstrate the artistic impact the Troupe had on dance in Egypt. The social impact of The Reda Troupe will not be discussed as this topic is beyond the scope of the forthcoming articles.

## **Dance That Took Place in Theater**

There were, and still are, Western dance ensembles that performed in major theaters in Cairo and Alexandria and other main cities, for the intellectual elite and upper classes. The repertoire of the season in the Opera House would have included such dance companies as: Sadler Wells, Marquis de Quevas, and the Spanish company Antonio and Rosario and many others.

Amateur dance schools gave their recitals in theaters. These schools catered to the children of the wealthy, as well as a large number of expatriots. European teachers, who taught different pseudo Western dance genres, owned these schools. It was common to find vaudeville type variety shows in music halls. In these kinds of shows, Belly dance served as a part of a program that included other elements, such as singing, acrobatics, and magic. There would be a few dancers dancing together in a rudimentary fashion most often behind a singer.

Dance functioned as background element in Dramas and musical plays, and was performed by professional folk dance entertainers or belly dancers. Their dancing was most often ad-libbed or presented in sketchy choreographies in a simple and haphazard manner. In these plays, dance was part of wedding scenes or processions and such likes. It was never of substantive importance to the play, nor was it integral to the sequence of events.

## **The Phenomenon of The Reda Troupe**

For the first time in recent history of dance in Egypt, a theatrical dance group was established. The unique approach to dance in Egypt came about through the artistic creativity of Mahmoud Reda, Ali Reda and myself. Our endeavors brought about a new theatrical genre where dance became at the forefront and all other arts such as music, songs and costuming etc. were important supporting elements.

For 25 years, I worked side by side with Mahmoud Reda during his creative development. I was his student, first dancer and partner in dance. Being close to him and attentive when he choreographed his dances allowed me to understand how he approached this artistic undertaking. This long journey has provided me with information and experience. The completion of my studies at the Dance Ethnology Department at U.C.L.A. has given me an academic perspective to my earlier experiences. The next article will deal with Mahmoud Reda's aesthetics, inspirations and adaptations for the stage.

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