

Spotlight on Kashani  
Interviewed By Halima  
Featured in Jareeda Magazine

H: Tell me a little about yourself on a personal level, family, where you live, etc.

K: I was born in a tiny little town in Maine and moved to the Olympia area in 1978. I've worked half-time for the state since 1981 and I'm married to the fabulous 'Mr. Kashani' (Vic). We have two children, a 23-year old disabled son who is a long-term brain cancer survivor and a 21 year old daughter who is "Amira" of Mas Uda (although she's not dancing much while she's away at college) - she is an absolute joy to watch, whether dancing or doing her marathon/triathlon 'thing' or whatever!

H: What first sparked your interest in Middle Eastern Dance?

K: I think I've always been attracted to 'different' music and to a variety of cultures. I did some folk dancing in college and a little when I first moved to Olympia. The camaraderie and the 'dress up' aspects of belly dance have appealed to me. It has just always seemed like so much fun. Additionally, it turns out that it has been very helpful in managing my fibromyalgia. As the mom of an ill 'kid', I've especially benefited from the relaxation that I find in the dance. It just feels SO GOOD to dance, especially with my 'troupe mates' who have become my best friends over the years, as well as many other dancers who have 'been there' in a variety of ways. The support that we've given each other through good and bad times is just unrivaled.

H. Who was your first instructor and who do you feel has influenced your dance?

K: My first instructor was Sherifa in 1982. She taught through what is now South Puget Sound Community College. I don't know if she's still dancing or if she's still in the area. Her given name is Helen and she was petite with dark hair.

Influences ----- WAY too many to even imagine!! Julie who used to teach in Olympia and was with Habibi Dancers of Lansing Michigan was an early influence - she was a taskmaster! I've tried to take workshops from many people, as I feel that you can learn SOMETHING from EVERYONE. Hasani is a good example of a 'truly community' spirited dancer. And, of course, you Halima have always been so TRULY supportive and such a source of knowledge. Mezdulene for her serenity, Cassandra for BEING Cassandra. And, one dancer who I don't remember much about - it was back when you were involved in producing the showcase, there was a dancer who was ABSOLUTELY positively perfect in technique, but as I watched her, I realized that she didn't look like she was enjoying herself, so I always try to remember 'if you're not having fun with it, you shouldn't be wasting your time or an audiences'.

Sahare, Mas Uda's first director was a HUGE influence on me, she always exuded happiness in her dancing. Baraka is one of the nicest people I've ever met. Other influences - Sikander Jaad, Saqra, Artemis Mourat, Habibah (from Maryland??) and a zillion (I exaggerate) others.....

H: How long have you been studying and when do you first start teaching?

K: Do I have to admit to THAT many years????? I started taking class in 1982 and began teaching when Sahare left as the troupe director in 1992

H: Where are you teaching now?

K: I teach at Capital City Ballet Studio in Olympia and at Mas Uda Studio in Lacey (at my home!!). I hope to add another location soon.

H: Tell me about your current involvement with the dance, ie., classes, performances etc.

K: I teach all levels of classes - beginner, intermediate, mixed, and performance, as well as facilitating a monthly rhythm circle because I believe that dancers MUST understand the music better than most do. I also offer workshops in a variety of subjects, especially zills!! I perform all around the western part of the state and will soon be handling the scheduling of dancers at a restaurant in downtown Olympia and dancing there myself, too. I actually prefer performing with the troupe (it's that camaraderie thing!!) to soloing. With Mas Uda I sponsor an annual day of workshops and evening performance as a benefit - we made \$1750 this year for Candlelighters Childhood Cancer Foundation (THANK you everyone for your support this year - it was outstanding!!). We also try to bring live music in to Olympia a few times a year as well as some workshops, too.

H: What do you feel the dance has done for you on a personal level?

K: Personally, the dance has helped me deal with massive stress. I really thought I was having a nervous breakdown at one point when I was dealing with treatments for my son. No matter what my mind set is when I start off to class, I always feel so good by the time I've warmed up. I've met some of the most wonderful women through the dance, too: Amazing people who've accomplished so much!

H: What contributions do you feel you have made to the dance community?

K: Hmm, this is the 'how would you like to be remembered part? --- I HOPE that I've made the dance exciting and accessible to lots of women and

helped all my students feel comfortable with themselves and what ever level of dance they can achieve - not everyone has to perform on stage; not everyone has to master specific aspects of the dance; each should take what they can use and make it work for them. I'm told that my classes are special because I add the cultural, music and costume aspects rather than JUST teaching dance steps and/or choreography. I hope that I've brought lots of variety to 'town' in the form of bands, performers and instructors, so that dancers in this area can expand their knowledge base. I also hope that I've been able to disseminate lots of info about our dance and to broaden the general public's perception of our dance. (WHEW - that sounds like lofty hopes and ambitions!!!)

H: Anything else you would like to share with us about you and the dance?

K: I do want to say that I really appreciate those in our dance who approach issues 'head on'. I like to KNOW if someone has a problem with something I or one of my troupe members has done or if someone thinks an event I'm involved with could be improved upon - positive suggestions and ideas are wonderful. I sometimes am bothered by the 'so and so said.....' 'stuff' that creeps into our dance groups. I would rather be told on a personal level than to hear it second hand.

Authors Note: Kashani is one of the most positive people when it comes to this dance she loves and is a driving force to keep it alive and well in the Olympia area. Kudos Kashani!