

1st Bellydance yearbook worldwide

# Belly Divas





# Festival

USA / Rakkasah / 2006

Rakkasah - 26 years of middle eastern dance in Richmond/California  
written by Said el Amir/Munich/Germany

Fairs - Fairs - Fairs... Germans are well known for their hyper organized and huge fairs - but how will this be in USA?

On the official Rakkasah webpage ([www.rakkasah.com](http://www.rakkasah.com)) is mentioned that if you book the weeklong workshops before a certain date you will automatically get a dance spot on the main stage. Hey man - that's what I did! :-)) I, then, have been very pleased when I got an email by Shukriya - organiser of this huge fair "Rakassah" in Richmond - saying that she would be glad to having me as a performer on the main stage. Well, I have to mention that I have never ever been to the States before nor do I have any DVDs or videos that could have been sold, so that she could have seen me before. It could have been also the cabaret stage... but: nevertheless, I got my chance and I took it!

America: anything goes!

Knowing big fairs in Germany like the "Orientmesse - BAZAR ORIENTAL/Berlin" or the "World of Orient - Hanover" (just to mention two of them), I had some ideas in mind how it could be.

Being a curious and open minded man I travelled to San Francisco - meant to be "near by" - in order to visit Rakassah. That was last year for the first time. Fortunately, I wasn't alone. Djamila/Frankfurt/Germany (photo 1) and her husband were also travelling to Rakkasah and so we shared a car. Attention: if you ever plan to visit Rakkasah you DO HAVE to rent a car. Travel distances in the USA are measured in minutes or hours not in miles or kilometres. If you want to go from San Francisco airport to Richmond it will be "only 1 hour drive"... ?? Do it ones and you know why they measure in time.

Knowing that Rakkasah exists since 26 years I expected to see a well organized event. Seeing the location of where the workshops were held, I - honestly spoken - have been surprised! This fair is meant to be a fair for dancers. In my opinion dancers do have to find certain



mass. As well there as here not always the named ones are the best ones! Apart from Bert Balladine who is an exceptional teacher for stage performers, there was Saqra ([www.saqra.net](http://www.saqra.net)) who ought to be mentioned. She dances since 30 years and teaches in a fantastic didactically and pedagogically way really good stuff. BRAVO!

The fair itself is held on three days. Friday is the opening day starting in the early evening at 7.00 pm until 11.00 pm. This is the chance to see all the stands with their offers which you can buy immediately or during the next two days from noon to 8 pm. Either you bring directly a van or you pay for shipping - anyway be sure to have a no limited credit card! During the fair time there are continuously performances on the main stage and on the cabaret stage. Spectators do have the possibility to sit down and relax while watching a sometimes spectacular (i.e. Suhaila Salimpour/California), sometimes

good (i.e. Willow Chang/Hawai'i) and sometimes bad (not to mention) show on stage - always a matter of taste, too. As anybody is allowed to dance on the stages (when and where is decided by the "dancers call in" without prejudice), you should have an official program for 1\$ if you want

prerequisites if you want them to work healthful. Sure, for such a huge fair it is almost impossible to find an affordable space with mirrors, I would even 'accept' carpet on the floor, but slabs on the "dance floor" are not very tempting for any kind of dance. How would this move the feelings of the students. And again I was surprised... the students didn't say anything (!?) it seemed to be "normal". Well, I decided not to take too many classes - although I paid for them in advance - because living of dance, I wanted to take care of my body and especially my legs/knees. The well known teachers do have between 50 to 80 pupils in their classes!!! This would be impossible in Germany! If you have more than 25 pupils in your class there, you would be "stoned to death". America: anything goes! Having a steady eye on the middle eastern dance scene and having been full of respect for the "Belly dance stars of America" (during the mid 80<sup>th</sup> until the mid 90<sup>th</sup>), I was really excited to acquaint these stars. Some of the Rakkasah teachers I already knew personally: such as Momo Kadous (photo 2), Leila Haddad, Bert Balladine (photo 1), Amaya, Suzanna Del Vecchio and Dalia Carella - namely I knew at least Fahtiem, Suhaila (photo 3) and Jamila Salimpour (photo 4). As well in the States as in Germany there are some jewels hidden in the



to save time. This time could be used if you are hungry or thirsty. There is a small canteen selling beverages and small snacks. After all, one has to see this - and any other - fair as a pool of talents and newcomer. If you want to be discovered or you search for new dancers for your own festival or you want to be inspired you have enough arguments to visit Rakkasah West.

**BUT:** it does rain in California!  
America: anything goes!

by Said el Amir

