

In Khalidah's World

Females Find Peace & Power In Afrika's Original Dance

By TERRI HILL

The labels I use when attempting to convey who I am or what I do for a living, the labels others use in describing me, and what I think to myself about myself, are three of the easiest ways others can determine my level of esteem. This is a life-affirming lesson I learned in the relatively short-time I spent in Khalidah Kali's world.

Khalidah is a woman who defines her universe with no excuses. A lecturer/practitioner of the North Afrikan Fertility Dance, she immediately corrects people who regretfully call her art "Belly Dancing." She'll insist that her art form transcends that label, then she'll explain how the dance is actually another stolen and exploited Afrikan legacy.

I witnessed Khalidah in two separate settings and noticed that on both occasions her level of self definition and comfort is extraordinary. Her day job is as a court stenographer and she is also a herbal therapist. Foremost, Khalidah takes a wholistic approach to self awareness specifically as it relates to the Afrikan woman.

The first time I saw Khalidah was at a performance of Khalidah's North Afrikan Dance Experience Company, of which she is founder, choreographer and artistic director. Prior to the dance performance, to set the crowd's mood for a taste of the Motherland, Khalidah burned raw incense, imported from Egyptian soil, and featured ethnically appropriate music.

Adorned in costumes collected in Egypt, India and Morocco, a few of the places Khalidah has traveled, the dancers, Folasade, Bhar, Allabatu, Cha Chana Abdullah, and Danielle Sherrrod, performed lively numbers, using finger cymbals, as well as calming ones, such as the "Peace" dance (a dance performed to a poem written by Paramahansa Yogananda). The show's finale was a solo by Khalidah. Her movements, concentrated in the mid-section of the body, used her arms and hands expressively accompanied by direct and vivid facial expressions. It is a style of dance unmistakably above what the Western culture has labeled and portrayed as "traditional" Egyptian dance. It is a dance that connects us back to our Afrikan origins.

Khalidah says "The popular dances seen today, the ones that have focus between the shoulders and the hips, are all variations of dance that originated in Afrika. We [Afrikan Americans] do them all the time, we should know where they came from and reclaim our legacy."

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Members of Khalidah's North Afrikan Dance Experience in repose.

style of dance is sacred and in Egypt is only done in private quarters. However, she teaches and performs it because "I want to share how to obtain this peaceful state of being," she says. "This dance is a soul searching adventure to self discovery."

Khalidah gained this knowledge through what can be called her own odyssey of self discovery. One which took her from ordinary young Black girl beginnings —her interest in dance was sparked when she won, at age 11, a neighborhood dance contest ("I danced the 'Funky Chicken,' she now says laughing)— to places around the world, in her search for the true meaning of "the dance" and particularly how it relates to the lives of women.

"When a woman does this [Egyptian] dance, different symbolic meanings are associated with each motion. "Wavelike or Serpent movements of the torso, hands, arms and hips symbolize power within. The combination of chest and shoulder shimmies [shaking] symbolize woman as a nurturer," Khalidah explains. "Hip shimmies symbolize life coming forth [birth]," she adds.

"The problems that women have are due to not knowing who we are. For an Afrikan woman to understand her person, place, time, and space... she has to be well aware of her woman, spiritual, and Afrikan studies," Khalidah tells. "(Understanding these studies) will help

her understand why it will be beneficial for her to practice this dance. The main, original intent of this Afrikan dance is to revere and honor the feminine aspect of divinity."

The spirituality of the dance, according to Khalidah, is manifest in the improved health of the female practitioner. She maintains that the dance promotes friendly stimulation and protects "the gate of life" (vagina), cleanses the pelvic area, strengthens the muscles in the vaginal wall, relaxes and gets the mind ready for meditation. It also kills stress and is a good method for weight loss. Its origins as a Fertility dance can also help childbearing women to learn breathing techniques.

To gain firsthand knowledge into the origin of this and other forms of expression, Khalidah has an extensive personal library that covers an entire wall in the Hyde Park home she shares with her husband, Farid. Her library includes such books as *Ageless Body, Timeless Mind; Women's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets;*

Sacred Sexuality: Living in the Vision of the Erotic Spirit; African Origins of Civilization, Myth or Reality; When God was a Woman; and her personal favorite, *Women Who Run With the Wolves.*

Khalidah quoted the following passage from *Women Who Run With the Wolves*, by Clarissa Estes, relating that it is her favorite: "The world is lonely for the comfort and for the hips and breasts of women. It calls out in a thousand-handed, million-voiced way, waving to us, plucking and pulling at us and asking for our attention..." It's apparent that Khalidah identifies with this expressive description of women's world power.

About the contents of her library, Khalidah says, "Obviously some of these authors are white...Afrikan people have to let ourselves be sensitive and aware enough to identify the Afrikan origin and presence in dance, clothing, music and books..." Then she adds in a soft but certain tone "...at this point in my life everything looks like Afrika to me."

As more Afrikans, American or otherwise, understand Khalidah's perspective we will inevitably enjoy a higher level of esteem and as our self esteem builds, so



PHOTO BY WILLE RILEY

will our global esteem. That is, if we do like Khalidah and reattach the original labels and intents to our world.

For information about the lectures, demonstrations, group and individual classes, solo and group performances offered by Khalidah, please call (312) 324-9305.