

MAD-HOT MEDGE

The Middle Eastern Dance Guild of Eugene celebrates 25 years with a show at the Wildish

“Twenty-five years seems like a significant milestone,” Denise Gilbertson says.

That’s perhaps the understatement of the new year for the silver anniversary of the Middle Eastern Dance Guild of Eugene (MEDGE), of which Gilbertson is a member. For any nonprofit arts group to reach the decade milestone, let alone the quarter-century mark, is cause for celebration.

“We decided that a show at the Wildish Theater featuring many of our troupes and musicians would be a great way to commemorate it,” Gilbertson says of the March 12 dance event.

As a nonprofit organization, MEDGE has spent the past 25 years fostering performance, education and the enjoyment of Middle Eastern dance and music in Eugene.

“We produce a show every month, host internationally known dance artists in workshops and performances, produce an annual fall festival, host an annual student show, publish a quarterly newsletter and maintain a library of resource materials,” Gilbertson explains.

MEDGE’s outreach efforts have included hosting Egyptian-American musician and dancer Karim Nagi in programs at three local schools, sponsoring author and dancer Tamalyn Dallal in a lecture and book signing, and presenting Algerian-born dance artist Amel Tafsout in a public lecture.

“And we are currently planning a program of dance

performance and mini-workshops at the Eugene Public Library in the fall,” Gilbertson says.

MEDGE is completely run by volunteers. Its work, sharing and teaching Middle Eastern dance, Gilbertson says, appeals to many because although it takes years — even decades — to master, the art form is inherently approachable and accessible, too.

“There are several excellent teachers in Eugene, most of whom belong to MEDGE,” Gilbertson says. “The dance is a performing art, yet it originated as a folk dance in countries such as Egypt, Lebanon and Turkey, where everyone might dance at parties or celebrations.”

Dancers can participate as students in a class and as performers at a student show, and they may graduate to performing at the monthly shows.

“The dance is also appealing because there are so many aspects to it,” Gilbertson continues. “There are different styles, cultural contexts.”

“Then there’s the music,” Gilbertson says, “which is beautiful, rhythmic and non-Western.”

For its 25th anniversary gala, audiences can expect a fast-paced show with 35 performers representing several styles of dance, from folkloric to traditional to contemporary fusion.

“All of our performers are MEDGE members, drawn from all over Oregon,” Gilbertson says. “Some favorites are Razia Star, Elena Villa, Amani, troupe Tribalation, Souza Chapa, Devi Safir and the musicians of Americanistan.”

Then there’s the music, Gilbertson points out, which is decidedly non-Western.


“There will be live music for several performances on instruments such as the oud, kanun, harmonium, Arabic tabla drum and tambourine,” Gilbertson says. “There is always something more to explore.” ■

Catch MEDGE’s 25th anniversary show 8 pm Saturday, March 12, at the Wildish Theater in Springfield. Tickets are \$15, available at wildishtheater.com

MEDGE PRESENTS BELLY DANCER RAZIA STAR



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