

## Review by MISHA 2007

With this offering by Kassir, World Belly Dance New York is once again thinking outside of the standard belly dance “box.” I have to confess; I truly enjoy Neon’s commitment to creating DVDs that feature those dancers that are perhaps a bit more obscure than some of the performers and instructors the other big production companies feature. Like anyone else, I relish watching the subtle snakiness of the Bellydance Superstar’s tribal contingent and marvel at the improvisational intricacies of Fat Chance and Gypsy Caravan. But I really do appreciate seeing an instructional offering from some of the up-and-coming dancers in the tribal world. Melanie and Karin of Kassir offer a fresh perspective on tribal in this instructional DVD and give viewers the unique opportunity to see and learn floorwork integrated into a tribal routine. It’s incredibly inspiring and beneficial to see another dancer’s interpretation of this evolving style and this DVD has a lot of material that is not found on other tribal offerings.

Here’s each of the sections, and a few notes on the material they contain:

“Warmup:” At Spirit of the Tribes in 2004, I watched Kassir drop, leap, and slink across the stage. It became quickly apparent that these two ladies had killer core strength in addition to their amazing technical ability. In this warmup, viewers will get a taste of the stretches and strength building exercises that Melanie and Karin use to support their sinuous style. Like Kassir’s multifaceted approach to tribal style belly dance, the warmup pulls from a variety of different philosophies in order to develop strength and flexibility within the body. The Warmup begins with a selection of yoga-based stretches, opening with a modified warrior pose. As the session progresses, additional poses are included, as are more traditional exercises such as the old tried-and-true runner’s hamstring stretch. Karin leads the viewer through a series of strength-building exercises that are pretty intense including “pulses” executed while in a very wide stance and a sort backwards push-up. It must be noted that these are most certainly exercises that will help one become stronger but they definitely require careful application and may not be for those just beginning their exercise regime. The final portion of the warmup includes a variety of stretches intended to open up the hips and improve leg flexibility. These stretches are done while seated and are much more gentle on the body compared to some of the other exercises in the warmup; this would be an excellent series of exercises for those beginning to dance.

“Isolations:” After the warmup, Melanie takes over to teach the various movements that will be utilized in the combinations featured on the DVD. Torso and ribcage movements come first, followed by hip isolations. Melanie gives clear, detailed descriptions of each movement as well as describing the muscles used to execute them. A particularly nice touch was her constant admonitions to maintain proper posture and tips on what *not* to do for the various movements. The girls cover some movements that will be familiar to those with an ATS background including the torso rotation and the body wave in the torso section and the taxseem and maya during the hip isolations. They also add in some unique moves (that have, dare I say it, an almost cabaret flair) including double drops, a nifty horizontal chest crescent, and an interesting variation on a reverse body wave. Each

movement is broken down, demonstrated, and then reviewed for a few minutes giving viewers plenty of time to work on the movement without feeling rushed or frustrated.

“Combinations:” The title of this DVD is “Fluid Precision” and nowhere is this more apparent than in the combinations Melanie and Karin have created. There are a total of four combinations, each lasting about 16 counts or so. First either Melanie or Karin demonstrates the isolations that make up the routine. These are practiced for a bit in sequence and then the arms are added on. Once again, there is plenty of time to study and practice the combination with the arm layer. Next, the girls speed it up, offering both a slow and fast version of the same movement series. The movements in the combos may seem simplistic at first, but the beauty of these combinations is mastering each separate isolation so that they can be strung together fluidly. Combinations that utilize usual body angles, unexpected level variations, weight changes, and movements performed with different stances (in “second” position instead of “first,” for example) provide viewers with an inspiring and exciting new selection of dance material.

“Floorwork:” The girls of Kassar are masters of fancy floorwork. The DVD contains (unfortunately only) two floorwork combinations. Like the other combos, these two offerings utilize the isolations reviewed earlier in the DVD. There are some great ideas here for both descending to, and rising up from, the floor that use the isolations. Kassar’s two creations once again make good use of the floor space and add some nice twists including level changes while on the floor and traveling on the floor, too.

The regular combinations are then strung together in a follow-along-and-practice series. This is a nice way to get an idea of how the combinations can flow from one into another and is, of course, the perfect opportunity to follow along and practice.

The final section of the DVD includes two lovely performances by Kassar. Here viewers can see where Melanie and Karin truly shine as they reveal their signature tribal duet style. One thing I **really** missed on this DVD was any combinations that could be utilized for duets. Melanie and Karin are so incredibly in sync when dancing together, as viewers will see in both of these performances, and they often have creative methods for interacting with one another while onstage. It’s a bit of a shame there wasn’t at least one combo designed for partner work (guess there will just need to be another DVD!).

What worked for me:

- Floorwork and level changes! Karin and Melanie create incredibly creative floorwork combinations and it was wonderful to not only see this during a performance but to learn it, too. Throughout the combinations there are wonderfully useful tips on level changes too, allowing viewers to learn new ways to add interest to their dance. Just wish there was **more** of this!
- Kassar’s costuming is absolutely gorgeous. They create some really unique pieces with lush textiles and patterns. Just looking at their costuming can inspire.
- The duo’s positioning during many of the DVD sections allows the viewer to see the movements from different angles. This was particularly useful during the

- combos and the warmup as it was nice to see what the stretches should look like from different vantage points.
- Pacing. The DVD moved at a steady pace that was refreshingly gentle. Information was presented slowly and carefully and there was plenty of time to practice the isolations and combinations.

What may not work for you:

- Got bad knees? I do. For those of us who have difficulty with those lovely joints, there may be parts of this DVD that are more than a little hard. While the floorwork would be challenging, it is not impossible and definitely something that those with sore knees could attempt and eventually perform.
- During some portions of the DVD it was difficult for me to hear what Melanie and Karin were saying. The music (which was awesome, by the way) seemed to be at an appropriate level, but for some reason the vocal track was not loud enough to be clearly heard over the song. This may have just been my copy, but I found it particularly difficult to hear the instructional portion during the Warmup.
- Some of the stretches and movements in this video are fairly intense (the knee bounces during the warmup, for instance) and may not be suitable for those just starting to belly dance. There is not too much detail given on performing the stretches properly, so care must be taken by the viewer to be sure that undue strain is not put on the body.
- As with several of the other World Dance DVDs, the lighting on the dancers is a bit difficult (on my TV at least) to view for long periods of time. In this offering Kassab is filmed under a red light with a blue background. While they definitely stand out, the red was at times very stark and almost blurred.