

Medea Mahdavi interview with Shahrzad Khorsandi

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I was delighted to host Shahrzad Khorsandi, on her first visit to the UK in May. After her masterclass in my studio I interviewed her for my website.

Tell me about your background

I was born in Tehran, but my family are from Isfahan, in the centre of Iran. I moved to the US when I was 11, during the Iranian Revolution.

What influenced you to become a dancer?

I was always dancing as a child. When we went to family parties, I was the last one dancing and I had to be dragged home when it was time to go. I never imagined becoming a professional dancer.



Where did you study dance?

I took jazz classes at high school and then enrolled to study modern dance at California Institute for the Arts. I then transferred to San Francisco State University to take masters in choreography and performance.

Where there opportunities to study Persian dance?

No, it was when I started my dance career that I realised that something was missing from my dance and this coincided with the chance to go back and visit Iran after many years of living in the US. I watched lots of video clips of Persian dance from before the Revolution and saw the Avaz dance company perform in LA.

How are you involved in dance now?

I teach regular classes in California. When I have the opportunity, I teach overseas, for example in Medea's dance studio in Bristol (between Spain and Slovenia). I also have my own dance company for performing at cultural events and community settings. We mainly perform classical Persian dance, with sometimes folk and contemporary.

What are the misconceptions about Persian dance that you come across?

A lot of students think that they have to wear a specific 'authentic' costume for classical dance such as Safavid or Ghajar. However, these are historical period costumes, and appropriate when doing a "period" dance, but are not the only authentic Persian dance costumes. Persian dance costumes should be inspired by Persian motifs and compliment the flow of the dance style. Another misconception is that because Persian dance is smooth flowing, rhythm doesn't play a part. So there is no pulse to the dance. This is wrong, it may also be because Persian musical rhythms are unfamiliar to Western ears.



What is your wish for Persian dance?

I would love Persian dance as an artform to be seen and respected alongside other Persian arts, particularly in academia.

What did you learn about Persian dance in the UK?

It was a real eye-opener to discover that there is such a strong interest and expertise in Persian dance in Bristol. I hope to come and visit again. Thank you Medea.



Photos taken in or outside Footwork Dance Studio in Bristol with Shahrzad Khorsandi teaching.