

# Suraya Hilal in Bristol, February 2020

I enjoyed my dance session with the legendary dancer Suraya Hilal in London so much so much that I invited her to my studio for Bristol dancers to experience her unique dance style. She was my guest for the weekend and she lead a Hilal Dance workshop. The participants enjoyed the deep yoga and body workout and breathing techniques in preparation for the dance. The participants summarised the whole workshop as 'excellent'. Suraya describes herself as positive and spiritual, I can add that she is also a lovely guest to have and my family enjoyed her stay too.



This is a brief interview with Suraya.

Suraya Hilal was born in Cairo of Egyptian and Yemeni heritage. She moved to the USA and then subsequently to the UK where she began her dance career with the support of the Arts Council creating many dance works with musicians and she toured for many years in the UK and Europe. She currently lives in Florence, Italy, with her husband Alessandro Bascioni who is also a dancer.

Medea: Can you describe your dance form to someone who is unfamiliar with your work?

Suraya: I developed a system of movement now called Hilal Dance that has roots in the Middle East and Africa but as it developed its movement language evolved into a modern universal form. My work and my style come from a deep inner knowledge and long practical experience; also, from a place of instinct. My workshops are open to everyone, indeed some people come without any dance experience, while others come from Indian, contemporary, Western – any form of dance background or yoga practice. This is the beauty of my system; it has a place for everyone. We start with breathing and then body work. When we start, with body work, it is usually in silence and then as we start to dance, we work with music, often contemporary music from Eastern and Western composers and musicians. And sometimes we use percussion from Nubia, Africa or other parts of the Middle East.

Medea: So, tell me about the feeling that you experience when you dance.

Suraya: It is all about the integration of the body as a whole entity, it is not just about technique. We work from an inner body space where then the movements and expressions emerge outward. It is about feeling and using a language that is both abstract and emotional. Authenticity is key, it is really to do with energy – you don't need to hide behind technique.

Medea: When you are creating your own work, do you work with musicians?

Suraya: Yes, sometimes, or other times I am inspired by a specific recording. I love to work in both ways.

Medea: Do you bring groups of dancers together to create work now?

Suraya: I prefer to work in smaller more intimate ways with smaller groups or just one or two dancers and musicians. Also, I now prefer to work in smaller spaces, and I like performing in unusual venues and working outdoors. My work can be very influenced by the specific space I am dancing in. If I'm working outside, I would rather create that work in the outside rather than creating inside and then moving outside to perform it.

Medea: Tell me about your Summer School and why this is a special year for you.

Suraya: This will be the 20th year of running our Summer School at the Tanzhaus in Düsseldorf. It is a fabulous place to teach and work. It is a cutting-edge space with beautiful dance studios. It takes place in July and it is a whole week of dance. It is a very international event and the Tanzhaus has always made me welcome. The Summer School developed after I started giving performances there.

Thank you, Suraya. I'm hoping to come to your Summer School to continue with the Hilal technique.

HilalDanceTeam

[www.hilaldance.com](http://www.hilaldance.com)

Medea Mahdavi, February 2020

### **Feedback from Alison Knight on Suraya's workshop in Bristol**

Thank you Suraya for your workshop last weekend. It was an incredible experience.

I have put together some feedback that you are welcome to use.

Suraya Hilal's workshop in Bristol, sponsored by Medea Mahdavi, was an impeccable sensory and creative exploration of body, breath, movement and fluidity. She has distilled years of dance and choreographic work into a concentrated suite of universal movements that underpin any physical-body in a state of motion. These primary movements in combination are able to produce more hues than can ever be seen.

Suraya has great presence in her teaching and can convey her unique taxonomy of movement with skill and deference. There is an emphasis on felt-sense in moving through the dance space that elicits a huge sense of freedom yet with a structure or scaffolding that holds everything together in one coherent whole. It is something that I would whole-heartedly recommend to any dance or movement practitioner, irrespective of genre, as something that would enhance their understanding of movement and add to their artistry.

Alison Knight, February 2020.