



To our valued MEDGE members!

March 17, 2008

I want to personally THANK all of you who attended our “All members” meeting we had on March 2nd regarding the many issues surrounding “Fusion and Alternative Dance”. We had thirty one members attend. The great attendance at this meeting was a direct reflection of how important these topics that we discussed are to all of us. Thank you also to those of you who supplied the Board with your viewpoints and input in writing and with telephone calls before and after the meeting. It was essential to hear the various points of view and to try to understand what the “issue” was to different people.

This meeting allowed everyone to have an opportunity to express their own views and be heard, and to hear the views of other people in our guild. It gave the Board an opportunity to dispel some of the rumors that had been circulating. It gave all of us MEDGE members a chance to voice our concerns, preferences, and also to express what we love about being a part of such a wonderful community of dancers. It provided a chance to meet the Board members and put a face to the name. Plus, just learning all of your names, it was great for me to meet you as well. ;-) All in all, I do believe it was a very successful meeting.

The Executive Board recently met to discuss the March 2nd meeting and the many letters, e-mail responses, and telephone calls that we received as a result of this discussion. As was the consensus from the meeting, we do not believe any changes in the by-laws are necessary to encompass the “Fusion and Alternative” issue at hand.

Below are some bullet points from our meeting that the Board feels these actions still fall under the umbrella of our current By-Laws.

- The vast majority of our members expressed that they “like things the way they are” at MEDGE shows, and that they enjoy the variety of dances they see that include Egyptian, cabaret, folkloric, Turkish, tribal, and many types of fusion.
- Fusing different dance forms with Middle Eastern dance is accepted and has always been accepted at MEDGE shows. In fact, to the best of our knowledge, there has never been a MEDGE show that did not include some kind of fusion or alternative (non-Middle Eastern) music.
- In the performance guidelines it is listed “*The Guild encourages dancers to use Middle Eastern as the standard for music, dance, and costume at all Guild performances.*”---One of the activities we did at the meeting showed that even with the vast differences in that room, for the most part folks do agree that the music, costuming, and dance should remain to be Middle Eastern influenced.
- Feedback from members shows that everyone who attended the meeting or wrote to the guild believes our performances should showcase dances that are somehow based in “belly dance”

or Middle Eastern Dance (though they could be fused with other dance forms, such as Indian, African, Flamenco, Ballet, etc.) In other words, other kinds of totally unrelated dances (such as tap dancing, hula hoop dancing, poi spinning, etc) may be beautiful dance art forms, but they do not fall under the umbrella of MEDGE. There are other groups out there that support these diverse dance art forms.

- Feedback from members tells us that the vast majority wants to hear music that is at least influenced by Middle Eastern or “world music” beats. A few (3 members) expressed interest in having performance forums open to any type of music, including Western music.
- There was extensive discussion regarding MEDGE possibly hosting up to two “Alternative Dance Night’s” a year, where choices of music, costuming, and dance presentations would be open to a wider range of possibilities. There was some talk of holding a “traditional night” as well. There was also some discussion about MEDGE supporting a “sister organization” that was open to these more diverse dance and styles and music choices. Some expressed that they would support a sister organization, others expressed that it would feel divisive. The Board has received a lot of feedback about this. In the spirit of inclusiveness, accommodation and growth, while ensuring the continuity and authenticity of the established organization, the Board decided that MEDGE would host the next “Alternative Dance Night” in February 2009 with another fully Alternative Show. We thought that this could be presented to the audience in February in the spirit of Mardi Gras. At this time, with our many other events and activities, MEDGE can only commit to one “Alternative Night” of dance in the next year, however, as stated before, fusion dance that is related to Middle Eastern dance, music, and costuming is **always** welcome at MEDGE monthly shows and at our Fall Dance Festival. The “alternative dance night” is to allow a forum where dancers can further explore music, costuming, and dance choices, and to inform the audience about the kind of show they can expect to see. That way, those who don’t care for alternative music can choose not to attend, and those who do attend will be ready to be supportive! While no move has been made by MEDGE to form a sister organization with the purpose of providing a more frequent venue for alternative dance, if such an organization does arise, the MEDGE Board is ready to be supportive in whatever way we can.
- Many members have told MEDGE that they enjoy the variety they have seen in the monthly shows. To incorporate this feedback, the Performance Coordinator will make an effort to balance out the monthly MEDGE show to foster a variety of different types of performances. This, of course, is limited to who actually contacts her requesting a dance spot every month. A perfect show could consist of many different dance types represented: traditional Middle Eastern dances, cabaret, Tribal ATS, Fusion dancing, and an occasional performance to alternative music. The key is that we need a balance of all types, so that one dance style does not dominate the monthly venue. In keeping with the performance guidelines, we will keep Middle Eastern Dance as our focus. In essence, we may limit fusion and alternative music performances every month to have a more balanced show. Again, fusion dances related to Middle Eastern dance are welcomed at MEDGE shows.
- Many members at the meeting, and other members who wrote to MEDGE, suggested that educating the audience was the key to successfully allowing many different kinds of dance to blend harmoniously in a show. MEDGE’s Goal in the By Laws is: *“The goal of the Middle Eastern Dance Guild of Eugene is to provide a venue and foster performance, education, understanding, and enjoyment of Middle Eastern Dance and Music.”*---In light of our goal as an organization, we would like to ask for more detailed information from each dancer regarding their dance they are performing so the dance can be appropriately announced. A new “dance

information card” is going to be drafted soon, with suggestions for the kind of information that dancers can think about and assemble in order to help the audience understand their dance and its cultural context. We would like this to be used by all performers so they can pay special attention to all the details regarding their dance. We want to educate the audience concerning what type of music is being played, what is the dance style they will be viewing, what type of costuming do they see, where on the globe did this dance come from?etc. We are taking it literally that we want to educate our audience and our members with our art. We expect that dancers will come to the performance more prepared with their performance information and not just “wing it” on the night of the show. This re-emphasis on the educational aspect of MEDGE that falls within the already established guidelines and by-laws for our guild. Although we may have strayed away from this in recent years, we are hearing our members say they want more education again! Thank you all, again, for your feedback.

- As stated at the meeting, we do appreciate everyone’s professionalism and kindness to each other. We want to support each other in what we do, and leave our unkind words at the door. It is evident that every single type of dance may not be your “cup of tea”. However, there is no room for hateful behavior either.
- Finally, as a step toward keeping open communication among our growing MEDGE membership, the Board is going to schedule an open membership meeting where we will give a “state of the union” address, and we will block out time for open discussion and questions, so we can keep tabs on how we are all doing. Previously this membership meeting was held in December, but since that is a very busy time of the year, we are considering holding a mid-year meeting. More information will be coming in the May newsletter.

In honor of our annual Celebration of International Dance Day, we have booked Zweena bint Asya of Bend, Oregon for two workshops on April 12th. One in particular is “Dancing Together” and I encourage all of us to come together and heal after this last year of turmoil. ** More information about the International Dance Day Gala Show on April 11th and Workshops on April 12th is included in this mailer. Please register for the workshops by April 5th to receive a discounted rate. As always, there is a special price break for MEDGE members.

One event sponsor had this to say about Zweena’s ‘Dancing Together’ workshop: “Zweena demonstrated her ability to facilitate deep discussion and build an effective team of dancers who were able to connect on a personal level, resolve conflicts, and allow their creativity to emerge both individually and as a group.”

We are a lot more alike than we are different. I hope to see you all very soon!

Yours in Dance,

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