

SCRIPT: An Attitude Makeover Towards Unconventional Dance In Egypt

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Lead In

The purpose of this audio documentary is to put a microscope on the general Egyptian attitude towards unfamiliar art, specifically the types of dance that people are not used to watching on stage. Tune in to see the development of this attitude over time from the perspective of members of an old hip-hop dance crew formed in 2003 and the current hip-hop instructor at the American University in Cairo.

Script

MUSIC: FADE IN: Backstreet Boys - Everybody (1:37 from the start of the song)

MAHMOUD SHOUKRY (MS): "I remember standing in the club and looking around and being like "Wow, everyone looks different." Having a belly dancer come up and dance, and then after that a girl that's on a violin, and then after that, a guy that was rapping. It's that diversity that shows how accepting people are of different art forms in this day and age." (:21)

MUSIC: FADE OUT at 2:01 from the start of the song

That was Mahmoud Shoukry, an old-time Egyptian dancer. He paints a rather nice picture of Egyptian tolerance, I would say.

That actually was today's Egypt that he was describing, believe it or not, and here is how his story began.

MUSIC: FADE IN: Bosses In The Booth Soundtrack (0:00 from the start of the soundtrack)

Shoukry put together a hip-hop dance crew at the American University in Cairo in 2003. It was called HOOD, which stands for Hallucinations of Obsessive Dancers and... people loved it?

Well, scratch that. It might be an overstatement.

MS: “By the time that we came around and you know, we had decided to start this thing, there was this sort of perspective as to, you know, “What is it that they’re doing?” “Um, why are they doing this?” “What is it exactly that they’re trying to achieve?”” (:14)

Okay, but you won so many talent shows.

MS: “People were so baffled by the fact that, you know, Egyptians can pull the kind of stuff that we, you know, watch on channels back in the day such as like MTV and what-not.” (:13)

MUSIC: FADE OUT at 00:50 from the start of the soundtrack

So, we can say the general response was somewhere in between “Oh, I haven’t seen dance like this around here before” and “Who do they think they are?”

MUSIC: FADE IN: Zane Dickinson – Happy Dance (00:00 at the start of the music)

MS: “You still have certain people that are like “Oh yeah, I can do that. Pfft. You move? I can... I can move.” (:05)

A comment like that quickly disregards the blood, sweat and tears shed by these dancers to perfect their choreography and be able to deliver on it.

While performing one show after the other, the dancers of HOOD learned that they also needed to be careful in choosing where to perform, what to be dressed like and the kind of moves they could pull on stage. That was mainly because of the pressure put on the girl dancers. Some of their boyfriends would complain about having their girlfriends looking too sultry on stage, and then they would have parents who didn’t allow their daughters to perform certain dance moves that they felt were provocative.

MUSIC: FADE OUT at 00:40 from the start of the music

SFX (in background): door opening and closing (:07)

Shahira Hamdy, another dancer from HOOD, had gotten pretty tired of being stuck in a box like that. She says it didn't take much from the female dancers to offend someone in the audience.

SFX (in background): footsteps on wooden floor (:25)

SHAHIRA HAMDY (SH): "Just certain moves like things that would be more of the sexy vibe than just hard-hitting hip-hop movements but it would be something more feminine or sexy or an unconventional story or something...things like that." (:20)

Eventually, in terms of choreography, they just let go of all preconceptions.

MUSIC: FADE IN: Bosses In The Booth Soundtrack (02:00) from the start of the soundtrack)

SH: "Once we found that "Oh my parent's are going to be okay with that. My boyfriend is okay with that. I'm okay with that. I'm comfortable in my body to do that. Once we all felt that this move or this concept or this choreography was okay for all of us, this is when we're like: okay, we don't care about anything else." (:19)

Honestly, that sounds like a lot of filters for classic hip-hop choreography.

Did you know that even MTV had to censor music videos for MTV Arabia in 2007? To reach a bigger market for their Arab version, they knew they had to broadcast less nudity and profane language. The chief executive of Arab Media Group, Abdullatif Al-Sayegh, said that they had and I quote "culturally sensitive editors going through the content of the programming."

MS: "There's always a threshold as to what you can tolerate as a people or as an audience. I feel like the threshold itself has expanded." (:11)

I believe that's good news.

MS: "Now, when I think about things that I can perform on stage, I feel like I don't have to tone things down. I don't have to tell a girl "You can't go on stage with shorts". "You know what? You can go on stage with shorts, a halter top and stilettos." You know what I mean? That's fine now." (:25)

MUSIC: FADE OUT at 03:30 from the start of the soundtrack

MUSIC: FADE IN: Zane Dickinson – Happy Dance (01:23 at the start of the music)

SH: "I feel like a lot of people are more open now and a lot of dancers started coming out more, and So You Think You Can Dance definitely changed a lot of people, especially now that it's on MBC4. Everybody's watching it... so I feel like people are kind of mentally more prepared for it." (:23)

I can't agree more. If we look at the attitude makeover in Egyptian society over the years, I think we can say that we've come a long way, but we still can't say that we're quite there yet.

MS: "I feel like generally people have realized that performing is just as hard as anything else. Dancing is just as hard as learning an instrument. Our bodies are instruments. We learn to treat them and we learn to take care of them. It's the same exact thing." (:21)

Essentially, people are starting to deem dance in Egypt with a lot more respect.

However, Lauren Clark, the current hip-hop instructor at AUC, says that especially when it comes to art forms, like hip-hop, that Egyptians are not necessarily very familiar with, it will take some time for the older generations to embrace.

MUSIC: FADE OUT at 2:38 from the start of the music

LAUREN CLARK (LC): "Why it's important to accept other cultures is that it opens your mind. It makes you understand that the world does not necessarily revolve around you and where you are. It makes you more connected with humanity. It really opens you up. It helps you see the different sides of things, where you don't feel like you're trapped in your cage, chained into this one way of thinking." (:20)

MUSIC: FADE IN: Chromeo – Fancy Footwork (00:50 from the start of the song)

This documentary was produced by Sarah Guirguis for the audio production course at the American University in Cairo taught by Kim Fox in Fall 2016. Special thanks to Mahmoud Shoukry, Shahira Hamdy and Lauren Clark for their interviews. Music from Everybody by Backstreet Boys, soundtrack from Bosses In The Booth documentary, Happy Dance from Shutterstock by Zane Dickinson, and Fancy Footwork by Chromeo. Sound effects from freesoundeffectsDOTcom.

MUSIC: FADE OUT at 01:20 from the start of the song

Credits

Music:

Everybody by Backstreet Boys

Introductory soundtrack from Bosses In The Booth documentary

Happy Dance from Shutterstock by Zane Dickinson

Fancy Footwork by Chromeo

SFX: both from freesoundeffects.com

Door opening and closing

Footsteps on wooden floor

Interviewees:

Mahmoud Shoukry

Shahira Hamdy

Lauren Clark