

## \*The Third تاتين\*

### a Sudanese Bridal Dance رقص العروس

*Dance and video performance 25:36 min , object installations*

The Sudanese bridal dance is a ceremony that traditionally takes place on the final day of the 7 days of wedding celebrations. The bride dances to show her agility, stamina, health, fertility, form, wealth and beauty. In a highly choreographed performance uniquely tailored to each new bride, the audience is taken through a musical journey depicting the different romantic stages leading from courtship to the wedding. Typically lasting from 1-3 hours with multiple costume changes, all sung from the women's perspective. The theme of the lyrics of the songs revolves around praising the bride, her family, and the groom and his family. Most women grow up watching older women in their community going through these rites of passage and gleaning knowledge over a lifetime. The dance includes many specific moves/games inserted into the show designed to break the ice between the newlyweds, entertain the guests, and as a type of showcasing the wealth and health of the bride.

While women grow up watching the dance, an intensive training period in a detailed choreographed set of songs, created specifically to highlight each individual bride's best qualities, is still required. Under the guidance of the *Allama* (a traditional dance trainer and singer) the bride practices the dance for three months, usually. During the three months, the bride learns everything she needs to know as an adult member of her community.

In the past, this dance would be performed in a semipublic location, with family and relatives of all genders welcomed (traditional Sudanese family includes even the furthest extension of relatives and neighbors). However, in the last three decades, this dance has become relegated to the women's only sector of the community and public performances have become socially taboo. There are many reasons for this, including the so-called "Islamic Renaissance" that began with former president Nimeiry's regime in the seventies, and continued to this day through the various political turnovers. Women's bodies became the central battleground for the new respectability politics of this era. At the same time, an intense national Arabization campaign was sweeping across Sudan attempting to create a new monolithic Muslim Arab national identity. As infrastructure became centralized in few urban centers, and the ongoing violent political unrest forced many people to move from their traditional tribal lands to the few urban hubs, like Khartoum. This changed the social structure of familiarity wherein before the majority of your community in the village were extended family members, to now living in more diverse neighborhoods.

This new proximity to various cultures and peoples was reflected in the dance. It changed the dynamics of the presentation of the dance: cloths, music, body visibility. Wherein traditionally the bride, danced in Rahat: a skirt with leather fringes and was topless, covering her upper body with jewelry; nowadays the bride dances in dresses.

Growing up male, I was allowed to attend these ceremonies until I started showing first signs of puberty, after which it was deemed socially inappropriate for me to attend. Since I could remember, I always loved this dance and all it symbolizes. It is a fundamental part of how I view and relate to home. Knowing as a male I would not be allowed to even attend one of ceremonies now, let alone

dare to perform it, is one of the motivations to acquire this cultural knowledge and present it. Another reason is being part of the legacy of keeping this dance alive.

I decided to learn this dance after years of contemplating my desire to learn it and trying to navigate how it could be done... throwing around questions like “who would be willing to teach a male to do it!?” and “where would we find the musical, and other materials needed for my body”.

In 2021 I traveled to Cairo and met up with my friend AlSarah, who learnt the dance from a long line of women throughout her life and who was willing to pass this legacy on to me. There we created a specific set tailored uniquely for me and trained for many weeks. Today, I am happy to be a part of the continuation of this legacy and honored to present you with the results of that work, in a traditional handmade costume.

\*The Third, or in Sudanese Arabic تالِثِن is a slur used to describe an effeminate boy who enjoys women’s company and activities.

### **The costume elements:**

Jadla الجدلة: head piece made with golden coins.

Masayer المسايرو المشاط : Front hairstyle parted and twisted around the ears. The back part braided.

Fedao الفِدَو : Large golden crescent shaped hoops.

Gasis necklace عقد القصيص : A necklace of handmade black and white glass beads.

Hijab الحجاب: An amulet.

Someet السوميت : a long cylinder-shaped gem stone.

Ghawaish الغوايش : Golden bangles.

Henna الحنة : Henna on both hands and feet.

Rahat الرحط : a skirt of leather fringes and Caory shells

“The Cutting of the Rahat” by the groom at the end of the bridal dance symbolizes the woman’s transition from single to married. From this day the bride wears Gurgab, a fabric, instead of Rahat, leather skirt, wears henna on her hands and feet, and uses a special perfume called khumra to indicate her status as a married woman.

Harira الحريرة: A pink silky pompom.

Yasur prayer beads سبحة اليسر : a prayer beads made traditionally with black and red sea corals.

Hugool الحجول : plural of Hegel حجل, or an anklet.

Thoub الثوب : 4.5 meters Sari-like fabric.

Ferkat Al Garmasis فركة القرمصيص : a traditional silk fabric, every bride gets as part of her dowry.

Arm bands of amulets غوايش الضراعات : worn in the upper arm.

7 dates السبع تمرات : 7 dates attached to the Rahat as a symbol of prosperity and good luck. The groom cuts piece of it and through it towards the single girls in the crowd.

Berish البرش: a hand-woven mat made from palm fronds.

Producer:: Graham Film

Director: Jakob Svensen

Photo: Christer Smital