

INTERVIEWS WITH PIONEER ARTISTS

The word art is immediately associated in our minds with an art object... a painting, sculpture... the fine arts. An artist is the executor of these objects.

An **artiste** is explained in the dictionary as a skilled performer: musical or theatrical: an entertainer.

We rarely call a singer, dancer, writer, actress "an artist." The word however is used as an adjective to indicate skill in performance.

Salwa Aoun el-Khatib Ballet Dancer

- Q. How did you choose to be a Ballet Dancer. What inspired you and who encouraged you?
- A. The urge and love to dance made me choose this career. I was inspired by a film I saw as a child.
- Q. What difficulties, if any, did you face as a dancer?
- A. Many! When I started taking ballet classes in 1950 people regarded dance pejoratively. My parents also did not appreciate this type of art. I had no encouragement from anyone.
- Q. As a woman artist how do you view the status of dancing as an art in the Arab world at present?
- A. It is gradually gaining prestige but not as it deserves.
- Q. What was the effect of war on the art and your career?
- A. War influenced art negatively. Many talented people left the country. The instability caused students to become less disciplined.
- Q. What — in your opinion — have women artists contributed to this specific field?
- A. Grace and beauty and some measure of self-discipline.
- Q. Narate an anecdote or interesting experience related to your career.
- A. As I was waiting to get a visa to France, I chatted with an unknown lady who mentioned that her daughter was studying ballet with a "famous teacher". That famous teacher turned out to be me. I then introduced myself and we both had a good laugh!

Only recently, in the Middle East and elsewhere in the world, have performers been called artists, thanks to the pioneer women artists who braved the frontiers to have the performing arts become more than just a form of entertainment but an art in itself.

Today Lebanon boasts of a number of artists in the different fields of art. The following interviewees are an example of pioneer women artists in the field of dancing acting.

- Q. What advise or message would you like to pass on to aspiring dancers?
- A. As a message, I would like to say that the dance, aside from its aesthetic value can be the best therapeutic means to combat tension. In a country like ours, dance provides a fantastic emotional release from tension, hence one feels much happier after having danced. Also it could be used clinically i.e. corrective: especially for flat feet and back problems.
A last word, let us hope that dance like all the other arts will bring some sunshine into our hearts.



Students at rehearsal

Nuha el-Khatib Saadeh

Actress

- Q. How did you get into the field of acting and who encouraged you?
- A. It happened with the emergence of the Lebanese Television Station. I had been accepted as an announcer after testing in front of a jury. Nobody really encouraged me. A strong feeling of capacity and love for this career helped me succeed.
- Q. What difficulties, if any, did you face as an actress?
- A. As an artist in this field the only difficulty that I faced was that I had to be patient and when the time came, take a chance in entering this field and moving from the task of announcer to that of actress — which was, at that time, a new kind of art in Lebanon.
- Q. As an artist how do you view the status of the art of acting in the Arab world at present? When did women start in this field?
- A. I am sorry to say that at present acting is still not regarded as an honored profession — except for classic theatre — in all the Arab world. Frankly, I do not know when women started in this field in the Arab world, but I am sure those acting at present are serious about their work, particularly in Egypt where it is practiced by highly educated women.
- Q. What was the effect of war on the art and your career?
- A. The effects of war were many both on the art and on my career in Lebanon. The negative ones are many such as taking into consideration only appearances without a feeling of responsibility or seriousness, good behaviour or even trying to have a feeling for this strange and dangerous little thing which is the screen or the microphone. But, in my opinion, my career as an announcer or an artist — acting in TV serials — is a sacred thing to which I have a deep feeling of familiarity and love. It is a relationship with the people I respect and like. On the positive side is also the fact that there have appeared many new faces and voices in the past few years which indicates that this art is developing in Lebanon.
- Q. What — in your opinion — have women contributed to this specific field?
- A. In my opinion women have contributed beauty and a fine capacity for acting with beautiful results.

- Q. Relate an anecdote or interesting experience related to your career as an artist.
- A. Many amusing incidents occurred to me during my career. I would like to relate the following: I was acting a scene from a play entitled "Until we meet" whereby my fellow actor, Joseph Nanou, who was playing the role of my husband was supposed to slap me. The Director, Elie Saadeh asked Joseph not to slap me too hard in order not to hurt me. But Joseph and I decided between us that the slap should be strong so that the sound could be picked up by the microphone. After rehearsing the scene according to the Director's instructions we prepared for the final scene and I braced myself to receive the slap agreed upon by Joseph and me. Joseph really slapped me and cut my lip. Since this was the last scene we were happy the Director did not comment from his observation booth, so we thought that everything had gone off very well. No one noticed that the slap was really strong — they thought it had been faked. But, it was so realistic that they said "bravo Nuha". After all the trouble Joseph and I went through, the sound of the slap was not picked up by the microphone and all our efforts at reality went in vain.



Nuha el-Khatib Saadeh in T.V Station