

A MOVING EXPERIENCE

By BONNIE LANGSTON
Freeman staff

MOVEMENT artist and storyteller Zuleikha is not easy to categorize, but audiences can draw their own conclusions tonight at Milagros, a new gourmet café, bar, marketplace and gallery in the historic Watts DePeyster Church in Tivoli.

Zuleikha, who is based in New Mexico, has been described by a St. Louis Dispatch reviewer as Meredith Monk blended with Marcel Marceau, an unlikely combo that creates the "magical realism" of native peoples partly with ankle bells "set tinkling by stomping bare feet and serpentine, diagonal arm gestures."

It's not your typical dance performance, but Zuleikha — complete with one-word name — is not typical.

SHE GREW up in a family of musicians in the culturally pluralistic San Francisco Bay area where she studied classical piano and flute. But she also worked for years with dancer and avant garde choreographer Anna Halprin, a pioneer of natural movement.

Additionally, in San Francisco, she attended the Ali Akbar College of Music and Dance, an institution named after Ali Akbar Khan, a noted musician from India. There she studied the classical North Indian dance form Kathak.

Zuleikha's work has also been informed by the cultures of Bali, China, Japan, and to some extent Africa. But her greatest influence comes from India, a country whose music took hold during the mid-1970s, she said, in the emerging world music scene on the West Coast.

"A LOT of people had never heard Indian music until then," she said, and it was not thought "normal." But

■ **Story-dancer**
Zuleikha will bring her many-faceted performance style to Tivoli tonight.

Zuleikha was intrigued.

Her love of dance and music seemed to resonate with Indian and other Eastern cultures.

"In the East, you can't learn dance without music," Zuleikha said. "You have to know how the music works in order to hear it."

Through a lifetime of dance, music and up-close experience of various cultures, Zuleikha has established a form of art and communication that travel with her around the world to venues that are as diverse as the elements she incorporates in her work.

SHE FOLLOWS a full schedule that takes her each year to places like schools, women's groups, movement seminars for organizations that feature complementary care, conferences in Jungian psychology, jazz festivals and more intimate concerts.

"I've learned to speak the languages of other societies," Zuleikha said.

In addition to solo performances, she has collaborated with world musicians and artists throughout the United

States and abroad, including Baba Olatungi, David Darling, Glen Velez, Coleman Barks and Eugene Friesen.

ZULEIKHA was featured on the public broadcasting system special "Dances From Wild Gardens," and she has cut a CD "Robe of Love," with her original melodies and lyrics taken from mystical poets Rumi, Mirabai and Kabir.

Her performance in Tivoli follows five days of teaching a women's retreat of movement, music and meditation at Omega Institute, an internationally recognized holistic learning center in Rhinebeck.

Zuleikha's approach in concert is theatrical, incorporating masks, dance and storytelling. And just as she creates her often flamboyant costumes from traditional materials making them distinctly her own, so she weaves her performance. The stories she tells go from the ridiculous to the sublime.

Zuleikha draws from many cultures for her costumes and dance styles but is most influenced by the music of India.



Among the many guises movement artist Zuleikha is likely to appear as are a colorfully-costumed whirling ethnic dancer, left, and a puppeteer in a frilly dress. The self-styled story-dancer was not specific about what tonight's audience might expect.

"I think things that happen in everyday life — as beautiful as they are — they're also ridiculous..." she said. "I look at art as a mirror of life. I'm always studying things, how people react to things."

LATELY Zuleikha has been exploring Broadway tunes, looking at their mixed messages and sharing them with audiences, bringing out humor, she said, that can lighten peoples' burdens. She sometimes appears as a character she calls Victim El Neurosa Ridiculosa.

Zuleikha first used her own unusual name as her dance name when she was in her teens. "It kind of stuck," she said, so she made it legal. The name "Zuleikha" is more likely found in places like South America, Persia, Russia or India, she said. But more familiarly, like "Beatrice," it means "bestowing blessings."

Zuleikha has been doing just that in her work in Delhi, India, with the Hope Project, which focuses on underprivileged women and children. She participated last year by teaching children movement, rhythm and song, and she intends to return for a longer period of time this winter. A portion of the money earned from the Tivoli concert and the Omega workshops may go toward that effort, Zuleikha said.

HER SCHEDULE is rigorous, but that's the way she likes it. "It gives me energy. I love to do my work," Zuleikha said. "It makes me feel good."

Story-dancer Zuleikha will perform at 8 p.m. today in the second-floor event room at Milagros in the historic Watts DePeyster Church, 73 Broadway in Tivoli. Tickets are \$15 for adults and \$10 for children ages 12 and younger. A combination ticket for an Indian dinner (starting at 5 p.m.) and the concert costs \$25. For reservations and information, call Milagros at (845) 757-3801 or Winter Sun and Summer Moon at (845) 876-3555 or (845) 876-2223.